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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL
BY WILLIAM MORRIS

THE SUNDERING FLOOD
BY WILLIAM MORRIS

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I

POCKET EDITION

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THE SUNDERING FLOOD

CHAPTER I

OF A RIVER CALLED THE SUNDERING FLOOD, AND
OF THE FOLK THAT DWELT THEREBY

It is told that there was once a mighty river which ran south into the sea, and at the mouth thereof was a great and rich city, which had been builded and had waxed and thriven because of the great and most excellent haven which the river aforesaid made where it fell into the sea. And now it was like looking at a huge wood of barked and smoothened fir-trees when one saw the masts of the ships that lay in the said haven.

But up this river ran the flood of tide a long way, so that the biggest of dromonds and round-ships might fare up it, and oft they lay amid pleasant up-country places, with their yards all but touching the windows of the husbandman's stead, and their bowsprits thrusting forth amongst the middens, and the routing swine, and querulous hens. And the uneasy lads and lasses sitting at high-mass of the Sunday in the grey village church would see the tall masts dimly amidst the painted saints of the aisle windows, and their minds would wander from the mass-hackled priest and the words and the gestures of him, and see visions of far

countries and outlandish folk, and some would be heart-smitten with that desire of wandering and looking on new things which so oft the sea-beat board and the wind-strained pine bear with them to the dwellings of the stay-at-homes : and to some it seemed as if, when they went from out the church, they should fall in with St. Thomas of India stepping over the gangway, and come to visit their uplandish Christmas and the Yule-feast of the field-abiders of mid-winter frost. And moreover, when the tide failed, and there was no longer a flood to bear the sea-going keels up-stream (and that was hard on an hundred of miles from the sea), yet was this great river a noble and wide-spreading water, and the downlong stream thereof not so heavy nor so fierce but that the barges and lesser keels might well spread their sails when the south-west blew, and fare on without beating ; or if the wind were fouler for them, they that were loth to reach from shore to shore might be tracked up by the draught of horses and bullocks, and bear the wares of the merchants to many a cheaping.

Other rivers moreover not a few fell into this main flood, and of them were some no lesser than the Thames is at Abingdon, where I, who gathered this tale, dwell in the House of the Black Canons ; blessed be St. William, and St. Richard, and the Holy Austin our candle in the dark ! Yea and some were even bigger, so that the land was well furnished both of fisheries and water-ways.

Now the name of this river was the Sundering Flood, and the city at the mouth thereof was called the City of the Sundering Flood. And it is no wonder, considering all that I have told concerning the wares and chaffer that it bore up-country, though the folk of the

City and its lands (and the city-folk in special) knew no cause for this name. Nay, oft they jested and gibed and gabbed, for they loved their river much and were proud of it ; wherefore they said it was no sunderer but a uniter ; that it joined land to land and shore to shore ; that it had peopled the wilderness and made the waste places blossom, and that no highway for wheels and beasts in all the land was so full of blessings and joys as was their own wet Highway of the Flood. Nevertheless, as meseemeth that no name is given to any town or mountain or river causeless, but that men are moved to name all steads for a remembrance of deeds that have been done and tidings that have befallen, or some due cause, even so might it well be with the Sundering Flood, and whereas also I wot something of that cause I shall now presently show you the same.

For ye must know that all this welfare of the said mighty river was during that while that it flowed through the plain country anigh the city, or the fertile pastures and acres of hill and dale and down further to the north. But one who should follow it up further and further would reach at last the place where it came forth from the mountains. There, though it be far smaller than lower down, yet is it still a mighty great water, and it is then well two hundred miles from the main sea. Now from the mountains it cometh in three great forces, and many smaller ones, and perilous and awful is it to behold ; for betwixt those forces it filleth all the mountain ghyll, and there is no foothold for man, nay for goat, save at a hundred foot or more above the water, and that evil and perilous ; and as is the running of a winter mill-stream to the beetles and shrew-mice that haunt the

greensward beside it, so is the running of that flood to the sons of Adam and the beasts that serve them : and none has been so bold as to strive to cast a bridge across it.

But when ye have journeyed with much toil and no little peril over the mountain-necks (for by the gorge of the river, as aforesaid, no man may go) and have come out of the mountains once more, then again ye have the flood before you, cleaving a great waste of rocks mingled with sand, where groweth neither tree nor bush nor grass ; and now the flood floweth wide and shallow but swift, so that no words may tell of its swiftness, and on either side the water are great wastes of tumbled stones that the spates have borne down from the higher ground. And ye shall know that from this place upward to its very wells in the higher mountains, the flood decreaseth not much in body or might, though it be wider or narrower as it is shallower or deeper, for nought but mere trickles of water fall into it in the space of this sandy waste, and what feeding it hath is from the bents and hills on either side as you wend toward the mountains to the north, where, as aforesaid, are its chiefest wells.

Now when ye have journeyed over this waste for some sixty miles, the land begins to better, and there is grass again, yet no trees, and it rises into bents, which go back on each side, east and west, from the Flood, and the said bents are grass also up to the tops, where they are crested with sheer rocks black of colour. As for the Flood itself, it is now gathered into straiter compass, and is deep, and exceeding strong ; high banks it hath on either side thereof of twenty foot and upward of black rock going down sheer to the water ; and thus it is for a long way, save that the banks be

higher and higher as the great valley of the river rises toward the northern mountains.

But as it rises the land betters yet, and is well grassed, and in divers nooks and crannies groweth small wood of birch and whiles of quicken tree ; but ever the best of the grass waxeth nigh unto the lips of the Sundering Flood, where it rises a little from the Dale to the water ; and what little acre-land there is, and it is but little, is up on knolls that lie nearer to the bent, and be turned somewhat southward ; or on the east side of the Flood (which runneth here nigh due north to south), on the bent-side itself, where, as it windeth and turneth, certain slopes lie turned to south-west. And in these places be a few garths, fenced against the deer, wherein grow rye, and some little barley whereof to make malt for beer and ale, whereas the folk of this high-up windy valley may have no comfort of wine. And it is to be said that ever is the land better and the getting more on the east side of the Sundering Flood than on the west.

As to the folk of this land, they are but few even now, and belike were fewer yet in the time of my tale. There was no great man amongst them, neither King, nor Earl, nor Alderman, and it had been hard living for a strong-thief in the Dale. Yet folk there were both on the east side and the west of the Flood. On neither side were they utterly cut off from the world outside the Dale ; for though it were toilsome it was not perilous to climb the bents and so wend over the necks east and west, where some forty miles from the west bank and fifty from the east you might come down into a valley fairly well peopled, wherein were two or three cheaping-towns : and to these towns the dalesmen had some resort, that they might sell such of their wool as they needed not to weave for them-

selves, and other small chaffer, so that they might buy wrought wares such as cutlery and pots, and above all boards and timber, whereof they had nought at home.

But this you must wot and understand, that howsoever the Sundering Flood might be misnamed down below, up in the Dale and down away to the southern mountains it was such that better named it might not be, and that nought might cross its waters undrowned save the fowl flying. Nay, and if one went up-stream to where it welled forth from the great mountains, he were no nearer to passing from one side to the other, for there would be nought before him but a wall of sheer rock, and above that rent and tumbled crags, the safe strong-houses of erne and osprey and gerfalcon. Wherefore all the dealings which the folk on the east Dale and the west might have with each other was but shouting and crying across the swirling and gurgling eddies of the black water, which themselves the while seemed to be talking together in some dread and unknown tongue.

True it is that on certain feast days, and above all on Midsummer night, the folk would pluck up a heart, and gather together as gaily clad as might be where the Flood was the narrowest (save at one place, whereof more hereafter) and there on each side would trundle the fire-wheel, and do other Midsummer games, and make music of string-play and horns, and sing songs of old time and drink to each other, and depart at last to their own homes blessing each other. But never might any man on the east touch the hand of any on the west, save it were that by some strange wandering from the cheaping-towns aforesaid they might meet at last, far and far off from the Dale of the Sundering Flood.

CHAPTER II

OF WETHERMEL AND THE CHILD OSBERNE

DRAW we nigher now to the heart of our tale, and tell how on the east side of the Sundering Flood was erewhile a stead hight Wethermel: a stead more lonely than most even in that Dale, the last house but one, and that was but a cot, toward the mountains at the head of the Dale. It was not ill set down, for its houses stood beneath a low spreading knoll, the broader side whereof was turned to the south-west, and where by consequence was good increase of corn year by year. The said knoll of Wethermel was amidst of the plain of the Dale a mile from the waterside, and all round about it the pasture was good for kine and horses and sheep all to the water's lip on the west and half way up the bent on the east; while towards the crown of the bent was a wood of bushes good for fire-wood and charcoal, and even beyond the crown of the bent was good sheep-land a long way.

Nevertheless, though its land was fruitful as for that country, yet had Wethermel no great name for luck, and folk who had the choice would liever dwell elsewhere, so that it was hard for the goodman to get men to work there for hire. Many folk deemed that this ill-luck came because the knoll had been of old time a dwelling of the Dwarfs or the Land-wights, and that they grudged it that the children of Adam had supplanted them, and that corn grew on the very roof of their ancient house. But however that might be, there was little thriving there for the most part: and at least it was noted by some, that if there were any good hap, it ever missed one generation, and went not

from father to son, but from grandsire to grandson : and even so it was now at the beginning of this tale.

For he who had been master of Wethermel had died a young man, and his wife followed him in a month or two, and there was left in the house but the father and mother of these twain, hale and stout folk, he of fifty winters, she of forty-five ; an old woman of seventy, a kinswoman of the house who had fostered the late goodman ; and a little lad who had to name Osberne, now twelve winters old, a child strong and bold, tall, bright and beauteous. These four were all the folk of Wethermel, save now and then a hired man who was hard pressed for livelihood would be got to abide there some six months or so. It must be told further that there was no house within ten miles either up or down the water on that side, save the little cot abovesaid nigher to the mountains, and that was four miles up-stream ; it hight Burcot, and was somewhat kenspeckle. Withal as to those Cloven Motes, as they were called, which were between the folk on either side, they were holden at a stead seven miles below Wethermel. So that in all wise was it a lonely and scanty-manned abode : and because of this every man on the stead must work somewhat hard and long day by day, and even Osberne the little lad must do his share ; and up to this time we tell of, his work was chiefly about the houses, or else it was on the knoll, or round about it, scaring fowl from the corn ; weeding the acre-ground, or tending the old horses that fed near the garth ; or goose-herding at whiles. Forsooth, the two elders, who loved and treasured the little carle exceedingly, were loth to trust him far out of sight because of his bold heart and wilful spirit ; and there were perils in the Dale, and in special at

that rough and wild end thereof, though they came not from weaponed reivers for the more part, though now and again some desperate outcast from the thicker peopled lands had strayed into it ; and there was talk from time to time of outlaws who lay out over the mountain-necks, and might not always do to lack a sheep or a neat or a horse. Other perils more of everyday there were for a young child, as the deep and hurrying stream of the Sundering Flood, and the wolves which haunted the bent and the foothills of the mountains ; and ever moreover there was the peril from creatures seldom seen, Dwarfs and Land-wights to wit, who, as all tales told, might be well pleased to have away into their realm so fair a child of the sons of Adam as was this Osberne.

Forsooth for the most part the lad kept within bounds, for love's sake rather than fear, though he wotted well that beating abode bound-breaking ; but ye may well wot that this quietness might not always be. And one while amongst others he was missing for long, and when his grandsire sought him he found him at last half way between grass and water above the fierce swirling stream of the river ; for he had clomb down the sheer rock of the bank, which all along the water is fashioned into staves, as it were organ-pipes, but here and there broken by I wot not what mighty power. There then was my lad in an ingle-nook of the rock, and not able either to go down or come up, till the goodman let a rope down to him and hauled him on to the grass.

Belike he was a little cowed by the peril, and the beating he got for putting his folk in such fear ; but though he was somewhat moved by his grandam's tears and lamentation over him, and no less by the

old carline's bewailing for his days that he would so surely shorten, yet this was not by a many the last time he strayed from the stead away into peril. On a time he was missing again night-long, but in the morning came into the house blithe and merry, but exceeding hungry, and when the goodman asked him where he had been and bade him whipping-cheer, he said that he cared little if beaten he were, so merry a time he had had ; for he had gone a long way up the Dale, and about twilight (this was in mid-May) had fallen in with a merry lad somewhat bigger than himself, who had shown him many merry plays, and at last had brought him to his house, "which is not builded of stone and turf, like to ours," saith he, "but is in a hole in the rock ; and there we wore away the night, and there was no one there but we two, and again he showed me more strange plays, which were wondrous ; but some did frighten me."

Then his grandsire asked him what like those plays were. Said Osberne : "He took a stone and stroked it, and mumbled, and it turned into a mouse, and played with us nought afraid a while ; but presently it grew much bigger, till it was bigger than a hare ; and great game meseemed that was, till on a sudden it stood on its hind-legs, and lo it was become a little child, and O, but so much littler than I ; and then it ran away from us into the dark, squealing the while like a mouse behind the panel, only louder. Well, thereafter, my playmate took a big knife, and said : 'Now, drudgling, I shall show thee a good game indeed.' And so he did, for he set the edge of the said knife against his neck, and off came his head ; but there came no blood, nor did he tumble down, but took up his head and stuck it on again, and then

stood crowing like our big red cock. Then he said : ' Poultry, cockerel, now will I do the like by thee.' And he came to me with the knife ; but I was afraid, and gat hold of his hand and had the knife from him ; and then I wrestled with him and gave him a fall ; but I must needs let him get up again presently, whereas he grew stronger under my hand ; then he thrust me from him and laughed exceeding much, and said : ' Here is a champion come into my house forsooth ! Well, I will leave thine head on thy shoulders, for belike I might not be able to stick it on again, which were a pity of thee, for a champion shalt thou verily be in the days to come.' After this all his play with me was to sit down and bid me hearken ; and then he took out a little pipe, and put it to his mouth, and made music out of it, which was both sweet and merry. And then he left that, and fell to telling me tales about the woods where big trees grow, and how his kindred had used to dwell therein, and fashioned most fair things in smith's work of gold and silver and iron ; and all this liked me well ; and he said : ' I tell thee that one day thou shalt have a sword of my father's father's fashioning, and that will be an old one, for they both were long-lived.' And as he spake I deemed that he was not like a child any more, but a little, little old man, white-haired and wrinkle-faced, but without a beard, and his hair shone like glass. And then—then I went to sleep, and when I woke up again it was morning, and I looked around and there was no one with me. So I arose and came home to you, and I am safe and sound if thou beat me not, kinsman."

Now ye may judge if his fore-elders were not scared by the lad's tale, for they knew that he had fallen in

with one of the Dwarf-kin, and his grandam caught him up and hugged him and kissed him well favouredly ; and the carline, whose name was Bridget, followed on the like road ; and then she said : “ See you, kinsmen, if it be not my doing that the blessed bairn has come back to us. Tell us, sweetheart, what thou hast round thy neck under thy shirt.” Osberne laughed. Said he : “ Thou didst hang on me a morsel of parchment with signs drawn thereon, and it is done in a silk bag. Fear not, fostermother, but that I will wear it yet, since thou makest such to-do over it.”

“ Ah ! the kind lad thou art, my dear,” said the carline. “ I will tell you, kinsmen, that I had that said parchment from our priest, and it is strong neck-guard against all evil things, for on it is scored the Holy Rood, and thereon are the names of the three Holy Kings, and other writing withal which I may not read, for it is in clerks’ Latin.” And again the two women made much of the little lad, while the goodman stood by grumbling and grunting ; but this time did Osberne escape his beating, though he was promised a drubbing which should give him much to think on if he went that way again ; and the women prayed and besought him to be obedient to the goodman herein.

But one thing he had not told his kinsfolk, to wit, that the Dwarf had given him for a gift that same knife wherewith he had played the game of heads-off, and a fair sheath went with it, and he had done him to wit that most like luck would go with it. Wherefore little Osberne had the said knife hidden under his raiment, along with the parchment whereon was scored the Holy Rood and the good words of wisdom written.

CHAPTER III

WOLVES HARRY THE FLOCK

Now these matters, and other strayings and misdoings of the youngling, befel before the time whereof I now tell, when he was, as aforesaid, passed of twelve years ; and it was in latter autumn, when the nights are lengthening. At this time there was a hired man dwelling with them, whose work it was to drive the sheep afield, either up on to the eastern bents or away off down to the water, so as they might not eat the grass of the kine from them. But Osberne, both of his own will and at the bidding of the goodman, went off afield with this man John and helped him to keep the sheep from straying over-far. Now one day at evening, somewhat later than he was wont, when, as it chanced, Osberne had not fared with him, back comes John from the bents, and he looked scared and pale, and he tells the tale that as the light began to fail up there, three huge wolves fell upon the sheep, and slew sundry of them, and it was easy to be seen of him that he had held no very close battle with the wolves, but had stood aloof till they had done their supper, and then gathered what he could of the sheep without going over-near the field of deed. The goodman berated him for his cowardice, and seemed to begrudge him his victuals somewhat that night, whereas, what with them whom the wolves had slain, and them who had perchance fled away, the flock was seventeen wethers short. John excused himself what he might, and said that he had no weapon, nought save his shepherd's staff, and that the wolves had slain

his dog in the first stour : but while he spake, Osberne, who sat by, deemed him somewhat stark and tall to be so little-hearted.

However, the next day the goodman and John must needs go up to the bent to see if they might find aught alive of the sheep that were missing, and each of them bore a shield and short spear, that they might make head against the wolves if that host should fall on them in the middle of the [day]. Meantime Osberne, by the goodman's bidding, drives the flock down toward the water, nothing loth, for ever the wondrous stream seemed to draw the lad to it. And a fair day he had of it, wandering amidst the sheep and being friendly with them, whiles drawing out his knife to look thereon, as oft he did when he was alone ; and forsooth it was a goodly weapon, carven with quaintnesses about the heft, the blade inlaid with runes done in gold, and the sheath of silver. Whiles also he stood on the river's lip and looked across the water, which was there in most places as big as the Thames is at Reading, but sometimes narrower. But there was nought stirring within eyeshot on the further bank that day, save the fowl, and a bull that came running along and lowing as he went on some errand, whatever it might be, for he was not followed of any men. So he came back with the flock before dark all safe ; neither had he gone far from the stead, for so he was bidden of his grandsire.

A little after comes in the goodman with John, neither of them in very sweet temper ; they had seen nought of the sheep save the hides and bones of a half score, but the wolves they had not failed to see ; they had come to the same place as the last night, and seemed by no means afraid of the man-host with its

spears and shields, wherefore these last had turned their backs and run from them stoutly, and now sat together glowering on each other, and casting now and again a gibe each at each. But they were at one in this, that the wolves were huge and fierce beyond measure, and such as any man might fear. But at last John spake and said : " Well, master, it is as they say down the Dale, that this is no lucky house ; meseems ye are beset with no common wolves, but with skin-changers who have taken the shape of wolves, whether they be Land-wights or Dwarfs, or ride-a-nights of the outlaws."

At that word waxed the master wood-wrath, as was his wont if any spake of the luck of Wethermel ; and he forgot his fear in his anger, and said : " Hearken the fool-talk of him ! Thou hadst not the heart for all thine inches to go forward before thy master, and a man on the downward side of years ; and now thou must needs make up fairy tales to cover thy cowardice." Said John, grinning, " Keep thy head, master ; for sooth it is that thou wert the first to run, and wert the first through the door."

" Thou liest," said the goodman ; " but this I tell thee, that whosoever was afraid then, thou shalt be afraid now." And he rose up and smote his man on the face so that he fell to the ground, and John leapt up and would have smitten his master again ; but even therewith comes in the goodwife, and Bridget with her, bearing in the supper smoking hot, and something seemed to hold John back from his blow, and he sat down, surly enough but silent. Then said the goodwife : " What is to do here ? Hast thou run against the settle-end, John, that thy cheek is red and blue ? "

Laughed the youngling thereat, and a word came into his mouth, and he sang :

All grey on the bent
There the sheep-greedy went :
The big spear and shield
Met the foes of the field,
But nought the white teeth
In the warriors gat sheath,
For master and man
Full meetly they ran.
But now in this hall
The fear off doth fall
From one of the twain,
And his hand getteth gain,
But the other sits there,
And new groweth his fear
Both of man and of grey.
So the meat on board lay,
Thou on whom gold doth ride,
Meat-goddess grey-eyed,
Let the loaf-warden eat,
And the man whom he beat,
And the lad that doth lie
In wall-nook hereby,
And thou Gold-tree the fair,
And the milk-mother dear,
Lest the meat wax a-cold
Both for bold and unbold.

Hereat all laughed, but the two men somewhat from one side of their mouths. And the goodman said : " See thou to it, kinsman, lest stripes be thy song-pay." But Osberne laughed from a fair and merry face and sang again :

O lord of the land,
To the staff lay no hand
Till the grey ones thou face
In the wind-weary place.

And therewith he fell to his meat and ate stoutly, and to the women it seemed that their little kinsman had the makings of a champion in him, and his staves they loved dearly in their hearts, and they smiled upon him kindly; and he looked from one to the other, and quoth he:

Three mothers had I,
And one is gone by,
But two are left here,
Leal, buxom, and dear.

As for the goodman, now the meat was getting into him the wrath was running off, and he thought within himself that presently he should have great avail of his grandson.

CHAPTER IV

SURLY JOHN FALLS OUT WITH THE GOODMAN

ON the morrow comes John to the goodman, and quoth he: "Master, there is small doubt that I shall one day pay thee for the pudding in the pot which thou gavest me yestreen, and after that I shall have to take my soles out of this straightway; so meseemeth I had best go hence to-day."

"Well," said the goodman, "if thou must go, go, and the devil go with thee. But as to the knock on thy cheekbone, I will boot thee therefor, if thou wilt

take boot and abide, for though thou be no hard worker, nor very deft of thy hands, yet the winter is lonely here, and thou wilt be missed somewhat."

Quoth John: "Yea, goodman, but there is this in it withal, that Wethermel liketh me not, though I say nought against thee for a master. I love not thy were-wolves, that are big and gruesome enough to frighten two stout armed men; and I love not thy Dwarfs, who cut off their own heads and stick them on again, and give guesting to little lads, doing them no hurt; for meseems that means that the said Dwarf will be craving guest-quarters here one day, and who knows how soon; and I care not for such an one as a fellow at board. And then there is thy grandson, and a fair boy he is and a good scald, though that be come upon him somewhat suddenly. But he is over big-wordy for me, and I see clearly that soon there shall be two masters in this house, and one is well enough for me. And lastly as to thy kinswomen; I wot well I shall have no good word from them year in year out. So take this for my last word, that I shall turn my back upon thee so soon as thou hast paid me my hire, and shall go seek quarters down the Dale, at some merrier stead than this."

The goodman looked on him sourly, and then turned about and took a bag from the chest, and drew silver from it, and told over certain pieces and laid them before John (who is henceforth called Surly John) and said: "Here is thine hire in good silver. And now I shall not say one more word to thee for good or bad, save this, that thou hadst best look to it that thy silver melt not before many months are over. Take thy soles out of this straightway." So John took up his silver, and stowed it in his pouch, and then he said:

“ Well, goodman, now that I am paid I think that I had best pay thee for the cheek-knock of last night.”

He was a tall man and strong of thirty winters, and the goodman somewhat on in years and not over strong, wherefore the battle seemed like to go all one way. But lo, as he rushed on the goodman, of a sudden he felt his feet pulled away from under him, and fell noseling to the ground ; and when he would rise, lo there was on one side of him the goodman with a cudgel in his hand, and Osberne on the other, with his whittle drawn ; and the lad laughed and said : “ Thou hast been a long while and used many words about going, so belike thou wert best tarry no longer ; or wert thou thinking thou wouldst go to bed ? Nay, thou hast talked long, but nought so long that it is night yet.”

So therewith Surly John arose and shook the dust of the floor off him, shouldered his bag, which he had ready by, and went out-of-doors and down the Dale afoot, for he was too shamefaced to crave the loan of a horse, to which forsooth the kinsmen would have made him welcome.

So the day wore amidst divers matters, and the sheep pastured anigh to the Mel ; but ever the goodman said that wolves or no wolves he must drive them up the bent next day. But he said this so often, that it seemed as if he were not over willing thereto ; and in the evening he took forth an old sword which he had, a good one, and sat whetting it with a hone. So they fared to bed.

But in the morning ere it was light the goodman deemed he heard goings-on in the house, and he sat up and hearkened. Next then he heard a hand amongst the three shields which hung on the panel the other side of his shut-bed, and thereafter he heard

one going to the door ; and he smiled thereat and lay down again, and presently there came the sound of the bleating of many sheep. So the carle stands up therewith, and does on his raiment, and takes his spear and shield, and girds his sword to him, and goeth forth and out of the garth, and turns his face up toward the bent, but goes very slow ; and day was now just beginning to dawn though the stars yet shone ; clear was the morning. Now in the grey light the carle could just see what he looked to see, to wit, the whole flock going together toward the bent, and a little figure of a son of Adam going after them, on whom a red scarlet hue was even dimly to be seen.

The carle smiled, and said to himself, Forsooth, yonder ruffler must needs clothe him in holiday raiment to do his doughty deed ! Now will I not follow him to mar his championship, but will leave him alone to his luck, which I see to be great.

So he abode a little in an ingle of the garth wall, while the sheep lessened but grew clearer before him, and the scarlet raiment of his grandson grew brighter ; and then he went swiftly, skirting the knoll till he had it betwixt him and the stead, and thereafter he went more leisurely toward the north. And he said to himself, The lad will do well enough ; and as to the women, they will make the less outcry, that when they find me and my weapons gone they will think I have fared with him up the bent. So therewith he betook himself well out of the way, keeping near to the bank of the river.

CHAPTER V

OSBERNE SLAYS THE WOLVES

As to Osberne, I will say nought of him till he comes back in the even, driving all his sheep before him, not one lacking, and two of the lost ones found. He bears with him shield and spear, and has the Dwarf-wrought whittle in his girdle. Over his shoulder to boot he bears a biggish bag, well-nigh big enough for so little a carle; of white linen it is, it hath something heavy in it, and is much stained with blood. So he folds the sheep straightway, and then comes into the hall, he and his bag, and throws the same into the ingle of the hearth fire. Then he casts a sack over his shoulders and sits before the bag, so that it may not be lightly seen. By this time it was dusking outside, and inside the hall it was pretty much dark save for the fire, where little flames leapt up now and again as some piece of the firing tumbled over. In the hall was no one, for the women were bringing in the kine, and the goodman was not yet come in from the field.

There he sits quietly, stirring little. And the next tidings is, the goodman comes home alone; he hears the sheep a-bleating, and goes glad at heart to the fold; and there is his joy eked, for by the light of the moon, which is now rising, he can see well enough to tell over the sheep, and finds two more than there were yesterday. So he goes speedily toward the hall, and the women now come up after him, having gotten the kine into the byre; so they all three go into the hall together.

Then cries out the goodman: "Is there aught in the hall now?" Osberne answers from where he

sat : " There is but little, for I am little." Then they turn and see him hugging himself up in the sack, and something at his back, they cannot see what ; and the goodman says : " What hast thou been about all day, kinsman ? Thou art forever foolhardy and a truant ; of right, stripes should pay thee for thy straying." Said Osberne : " I have been shepherding sheep ; may it not buy me off the stripes that I have found two of the lost ones, and brought back all safe ? " " Maybe," says the master ; " but did aught else befall thee ? " Says the lad : " Will it not buy me off beating that I have also brought home catch ? "

" Yea, if the catch be good," says the goodman. " It is but a leash of snipes, which I got me in a corner of the bog up yonder," says Osberne. " Snipes ! " says Bridget ; " deft art thou, fosterling, to take them without either springe or stone-bow, and they all fluttering like butterflies on a March day."

" Yea, auntie," saith he, " but a stone or two might avail without the bow, were one deft enough. Yet with no such weapons did I slay them ; ask me what weapons I bore against them." Therewith he stirs and shakes himself, and off tumbles the sack from his shoulders, and therewith his grandam lights up the candles, and they all see the scarlet and gold of his holiday raiment ; and Bridget says : " This also will I ask thee, fosterling, do men go out to take snipes in their holiday raiment ? "

" I will tell thee," says the little lad : " the weapons I bore against the catch were the shield to ward, and the spear to thrust, and the knife for the shearing of the heads ; and I tell thee that when men go to battle they use to wend in their fair-dyed raiment."

Then he stood up in the hall, the little one, but trim

and goodly, with gleaming eyes and bright hair, and a word came into his mouth :

On the wind-weary bent
The grey ones they went,
Growled the greedy and glared
On the sheep-kin afeared ;
Low looked the bright sun
On the battle begun,
For they saw how the swain
Stood betwixt them and gain.

'T was the spear in the belly, the spear in the mouth,
And a warp of the shield from the north to the south ;
The spear in the throat, and the eyes of the sun
Scarce shut as the last of the battle was done.

“ Well sung, kinsman ! ” said the goodman : “ now shalt thou show us the snipes.” But ere the lad might stoop to his bag the two women were upon him, clipping and kissing him as if they would never have enough thereof. He made a shift to thrust them off at last, and stooping to his bag he drew out something and cast it on the board, and lo the sheared-off head of a great grey wolf with gaping jaws and glistening white fangs, and the women shrank before it. But Osberne said : “ Lo the first of the catch, and here is the second.” And again he drew out a head from the bag and cast it on the board ; and so with the third in due course.

“ Now,” said he, “ the bag is empty, and deemest thou, grandsire, that I have bought me off my beating ? And thou, grandam, I pray thee, give me my meat, for I am anhungered.” So now they had nought but praises and caresses for him, and they made as it were a new feast of that November day, and were as merry as if they were feasting the best days of Yule.

CHAPTER VI

THEY FARE TO THE CLOVEN MOTE

AND now the days wore away to winter, and ever thereafter might Osberne do what he would, and go where he would, for as little a lad as he was; but he worked with a good will if he were uncompelled, and if he were suffered to wander at whiles as his will drave him. Forsooth, since he had no fellows of a like age to him, it was whiles that he found the open field or the waste gave him better fellowship than the older folk, yea even than the women.

Winter came, and the snow and the frost, which was not very hard in that land, as many would have been glad if it were, for then might the Sundering Flood have been laid with ice, which never betid. On the morning of Yule day, Osberne and his grandsire and grandam got under way long before daylight, that they might go to the Cloven Mote, and hear the Christmass in the church of Allhallows, which had been builded on the east side of the water to be the church of the Mote; but on the other side of the water was another church like to it in all ways, and under the same invocation, for the Western folk. This was the first time that Osberne had been boun to the Mote, and withal both the women were wont to stay at home: but this time nought would serve the goodwife but she must wend with her man, that she might show her darling and her champion to the neighbours. It was a matter of seven miles down the water to the Mote-stead, and they went aslant over the snow-covered fields, and hit the river-bank about half way, and went thence along the very lip of the

water. And by then it was pretty much daylight ; and Osberne looked over the water and saw about a half mile off (for the day was clear) two little knolls rising from the field, and betwixt them and about them a shaw of small wood ; and he asked his grandsire what that might be, for hitherto he had never been so far down the water ; whereas before he slew the wolves, down the water was banned to him, and after that he had been busy about the houses and folds, or driving the sheep to the bents day by day.

So his grandsire answered him : “ That is hight Hartshaw, and we are told that on the other side of the shaw and the knolls looking west is a stead with houses inhabited, and the whole place is hight Hartshaw Knolls.” Said Osberne : “ I would we were there a while, for as I look at the stead it seemeth friendly to me, and I fare to feel that the folk thereof shall come into my life some day.” Answered the goodman : “ We hear that little dwelleth there save a widow-woman and her one child, a little maiden. And as to thy one day, it shall be a long while coming ; for long and long shall it be for any one to encompass the Sundering Flood, save the Winter of Fear come upon us, and all the land be overlaid with ice, and the waters of the Flood be stayed ; which may God and Allhallows forfend.”

The lad said nought for a while ; and then he said : “ Goodman, I would we had gone down to river-bank from out our own door, and gone all along the Flood-side to the Mote ; for it were pleasant to have looked across the Flood, thinking of all there is on the other side, and wondering if we shall ever get there. Why did we not this, for on the very bank the going

is better?" Said the carle: "We have come the shortest way this bitter winter morning; that is all."

Herein he lied; for they had gone that slant way to give the go-by to a certain place of the Flood-bank which the Dale-dwellers deemed perilous; but thereof he would not tell the little carle, now that he was become so masterful, deeming that if he heard of any peril toward he would be all agog to try the adventure thereof, as forsooth was true. Of this place, which lay now but just behind them, shall more be told hereafter.

Now they come to the Mote in good time when the sun was but just arisen, and there was already a throng; and at their coming the folk on the western side raised a shout, as the folk on either side were wont to welcome newcomers; but the very first man they hit upon was Surly John; and the goodwife, a soft, kind woman, hailed him friendly, and was fain to have some one whom she knew unto whom to tell her tale of the champion and the wolves. For indeed it needs must out to the very first comer, and out it came now, many worded, and folk, both men and women, gathered about the twain to hearken; for the goodwife told it all well and without hitch.

Surly John must needs abide the telling of it, but when it was done he said: "Well, dame, so it is that I always deemed the lad kenspeckle; and it has moreover turned out as I warned you, that you have got a new master over you." And therewith he turned away; but of those others who heard the tale there were more than one or two who praised it much, and deemed it marvellous as might well be that a child should have faced and slain those three monsters who had put two stout men to flight. And one man made

up this stave, which was presently sung all about the Eastern Mote, and went over the water with the tale to the Western one :

To run and to fight
Are deeds free to the wight,
And John tried in battle
Had heard the boards rattle,
But needed to prove
The race back to the stove ;
So his wightness he showed
In way-wearing the road.
While Osberne, who knew
How the foot-race to do,
Must try the new game
Where the battle-beasts came.

Bairn for fight, but for running the strong man and tall,
And all folk for the laughter when both are in hall.

When Surly John heard this stave he cursed between his teeth, but said nought.

But now on either side the churches fell to ringing to mass, and all folk fared to service. And Osberne sat in a good place amongst the carles, and forsooth he had both ears and eyes open, both then and all day. Mass over, the cooking-fires were lighted and tents were pitched on either side the water, and in a while they went to dinner ; and thereafter, when they had sung a while, came the time of drinking, and folk were paired, men and women so far as might be, for more men there were than women. But whereas all men save Surly John were well with Osberne, there was gotten for his mate a fair young damsel of but seventeen winters, and Osberne, who had looked hard on all the women who were well-liking (for he had seen

but very seldom any women save those two of his kinsfolk), was amazed with joy when the dear maid pulled down her hood and pulled off her gloves. And whereas she was shy of him because of his doughtiness, for all that he was but a child, it was not until they had drunk a cup or two that he took heart to set his hand to her neck and kiss her cheeks and her mouth, whereat she blushed rosy red, and all they that were in the tent laughed and cheered. But thereafter they fell to sweet speech and talked much, and he held her hand when the end of the feast was done ; which was after this wise, that folk stood on the very lip of the river in one long row hand in hand, and the loving-cup went down each row, and they cried healths to each other, and then lifted up their voices and shouted all together, and so undid the Mote and parted. And this time (and it was dark save for the fires flaring behind them) it was the maid that kissed Osberne ; neither needed she, a tall dāmsel though she was, to stoop much thereto, for right big and tall he was of his years.

So then all went back each to his own home. And the winter wore away at Wethermel with nought to tell of.

CHAPTER VII

OF A NEWCOMER, AND HIS GIFT TO OSBERNE

Now when spring came again, needs must Osberne drive the sheep up to the bents, though he had liefer haunted the river-side, for sore he desired to cross the flood and find out tidings there. And though he were a child, yet he would by his own choice have fared to

seek out the pretty maiden whose hand he had held on the edge of the river that even, but livelihood drove him to look to the sheep now that the spring grass was growing.

So on a certain day when March was wearing towards April he drove his sheep up over the crown of the bent ; and there he went with them a way where, the land still rising, the ground was hard and rocky but clean, and the grass sweet for as scanty as it was, growing in little hollows and shelters round about the rocks. Wherefore the sheep were nimble in their feeding, and led him on long, till they and he were come into a grassy little dale with a stream running through it. There they were neither to hold nor to bind, but strayed all up and down the dale and over the crest of the bent thereof, and would not come to his call ; and his dog was young and not very wise, and could do little to help him. So he began to think he had best gather what of the sheep he could, and drive them home and fold them, and then come back and hunt for the rest, perhaps with the help of his grandsire ; but as the ones he could get at were all close anigh, and he was hot and weary with running hither and thither and holloaing to sheep and dog, he would go down to the stream and drink and rest awhile first. And even so he did, and lay down by the water and drank a long draught ; but while he was about it he thought he heard footsteps coming down the hillside over the greensward.

Howsoever, he had his drink out, and then rose to his knees and looked up, and therewith sprang hastily to his feet, for a tall man was coming on toward him not ten yards from the stream. He was not to say afraid by the sight, yet somewhat startled, for the

man was not his grandsire, nor forsooth did he seem to be one of the Dale-dwellers. For he was so clad that he had a grey hawberk on him of fine ring-mail, and a scarlet coat thereunder embroidered goodly ; a big gold ring was on his left arm, a bright basnet on his head ; he was girt with a sword, and bare a bow in his hand, and a quiver hung at his back. He was a goodly man, young by seeming, bright-faced and grey-eyed ; his hair was yellow and as fine as silk, and it hung down over his shoulders.

Now Osberne put as good a face on the meeting as he might, and gave the newcomer the sele of the day, and he hailed him again in a clear loud voice, and they stood looking on each other across the stream a while. Then the newcomer laughed pleasantly and said : " Hast thou any name that I may call thee by ? "

" I am Osberne of Wethermel," said the youngling. " Aha," said the man, " art thou he that slew the leash of great grey wolves last autumn, who had put two armed men to flight the day before ? " Said Osberne, reddening : " Well, what was I to do ? There fell a leash of hill-dogs on our sheep, and I made them forbear. Was it a scathe to thee, lord ? " The newcomer laughed again : " Nay, my lad," said he, " I love them no more than ye do ; they were no dogs of mine. But what doest thou here ? "

" Thou seest," said the youngling, " that I am shepherding our sheep ; and a many have run from me, and I cannot bring them back to me. So I was going home with those that be left."

" Well," says the man, " we can soon mend that. Rest thou here and abide my coming back again, and I will fetch them for thee."

“ With a good will,” says Osberne, “ and I shall can thee many thanks therefor.”

So the man strode on and through the stream, and went his ways up the further bent, and Osberne sat down on a stone and abode him in no little wonder. The man was gone somewhat more than an hour, and then Osberne sees the sheep topping the crest of the bent and pouring down into the dale, and the new-comer came next driving them down ; and when they came to the stream they stood there and moved no more than if they were penned.

Then the newcomer came through them up to Osberne, and said in a kind voice, though it was loud : “ What, art thou here yet ? I deemed that thou wouldst have run home.”

“ Why should I have run ? ” said the lad. “ For fear of me,” said the other. Said Osberne : “ I was somewhat afraid when I first saw thee, and thou with the grey byrny and the gleaming helm ; but then I saw that thou wert no ill man, and I feared thee no longer. Withal I was fain to see thee again ; for thou art goodly and fair to behold, and I am fain to remember thee.”

Said the man : “ Even so have others said ere now.” “ Were they women ? ” said Osberne. “ Thou art brisk and keen, youngling,” said the man. “ Yes, they were women : but it was long ago.” “ Yet thou lookest no old man,” said Osberne. “ I have seen old men : they be nought like to thee.”

“ Heed thou not that,” said the helmed man : “ but tell me, how old a man art thou ? ” Said Osberne : “ When this April is three days old I shall be thirteen years old.”

Said the man of the waste : “ Well, thou art stal-

warth for thy years, and that liketh me well, and meseems that we shall be friends hereafter : and when thou art a grown man I shall seem no older to thee ; nay, we shall be as brothers. Belike I shall see thee again before long ; meanwhile, I give thee this rede : when thou mayest, seek thou to the side of the Sundering Flood, for meseemeth that there lieth thy weird. Now there is this last word to be said, that I came hither to-day to see thee, and in token thereof I have brought thee a gift. Canst thou shoot in the bow aught ? ” Said Osberne : “ There is one at home, and my grandsire hath bent it for me at whiles, and taught me how to shoot somewhat ; but I am little deft therein.”

Then the man betook him the bow which he had in his hand and said : “ Here is one that shall make thee deft ; for whoso hath this as a gift from me shall hit what he shooteth at if he use my shafts withal, and here be three which I will give thee ; and if thou take heed, thou shalt not find them easy to lose, since ever they shall go home. But if ever thou lose two of them, then take the third and go into some waste place where there is neither meadow nor acre, and turn to the north-east and shoot upward toward the heavens, and say this rhyme :

A shaft to the north,
 Come ye three, come ye forth ;
 A shaft to the east,
 Come three at the least ;
 A shaft to the sky.
 Come swift, come anigh !
 Come one, one and one,
 And the tale is all done.

And then shalt thou find the arrows lying at thy feet. Now take the bow and arrows, and drive me thy sheep betwixt us to the top of the bent that looks down on Wethermel."

Then Osberne took the bow and shafts, and he all quivering with joy and delight, and then the two of them together went back across the waste with the sheep before them, and as they went side by side the man said many things, and this at last: "Now that I know thy name, it is like that thou wouldst know mine and who I am; but my very name I may not tell thee, for thy tongue has no word for it, but now and when we meet again thou mayst call me Steelhead: and thou shalt know that when next we meet I shall be arrayed all otherwise than now. In that array I deem thou wilt know me, but look to it that thou show no sign thereof before other men; and as to the bow, thou wilt not be eager belike to say of whom thou hadst it. Lo now! we have opened up Wethermel; fare thou well, bold bairn, and forget not my redes."

And therewith he turned about and gat him gone into the waste again, striding hugely; and the lad was sorry to lack him, for he deemed him the goodliest and best man that he had ever met.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GOODMAN GETS A NEW HIRED MAN

Now when he came home to Wethermel he found tidings there, for the goodman had gotten a new hired man, and he showed him to Osberne, who greeted him well: he was a tall man, mild of aspect and speech, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, and seemed a stark carle.

He had come to the stead that morning while the goodman was away, and had craved guesting of the women, who made him welcome and set him down to meat. He told them that his name was Stephen, that he had been born in the country-side, but had gone thence in his early youth to Eastcheaping, which was the market town whither that folk had resort ; and that he had grown up there and there wedded a wife ; but that when she died in childing with her first bairn, and the bairn had not lived, he loathed the place, and came back again into the Dale.

So when the goodman came home this Stephen offered himself to him, and said that he deemed he could do as good a stroke of work as another, and that he was not for any great wage, but he must not be stinted of his meat, whereas he was a heavy feeder. The goodman liked the looks of him, and they struck the bargain betwixt them straightway, and Stephen had hansel of a second dinner, and ate well thereat ; and henceforth is he called Stephen the Eater.

Now when the goodman saw Osberne bring in his new weapon, he asked him whence he had it, and the lad told him that he had been far in the waste, and had found it there. The goodman eyed him, but said nought. Forsooth he misdoubted him that the bow was somewhat unked, and that the lad had had some new dealings with the Dwarf-kin or other strange wights. But then he bethought him of Osberne's luck, and withal it came into his mind that now he had gotten this victual-waster it would not be ill if his lad should shoot them some venison or fowl now and again ; and by the look of the bow he deemed it like to be a lucky one. But Stephen reached out for the bow, and handled it and turned it about, and

spake : " This is a handy weapon, and they who made it were not without craft, and it pleases me to see it ; for now when it brings home prey in the evening, the goodman will deem my maw the less burdensome to him. By my rede, goodman, ye will do well to make thy youngling the hunter to us all, for such bows as this may be shot in only by them that be fated thereto." And he nodded and smiled on Osberne, and the lad deemed that the new man would be friendly to him.

So then was supper brought in, and Stephen the Eater played as good a part as if he had eaten nought since sunrise.

But the next day, when Stephen was boun for driving the sheep to the bent, he said to Osberne : " Come thou with me, young master, to show me the way ; and bring thy bow and arrows withal, and see if thou canst shoot us something toothsome, for both of feathers and fur there is foison on the hill-side." So they went together, and betwixt whiles of the shepherding Osberne shot a whole string of heath-fowl and whimbrel ; and ever he hit that which he shot at, so that the arrows were easy indeed to find, since they never failed to be in the quarry.

The goodman was well pleased with his catch, and Stephen licked his lips over the look of the larder. And the next day the lad let Stephen go alone to the hill, and he himself took a horse and went up the water a ten miles toward the mountain, and there he slew a hart of ten tines with one arrow, and brought the quarry home across the horse, to the joy of all the household, and the goodman was not rueing his bargain with Stephen the Eater. So it went on that every two or three days Osberne fared afield after catch, and but seldom came home empty-handed, and the other days

he did as he would and went where he listed. And now he began to follow the rede of Steelhead, and went oftenest by the side of the Sundering Flood, but as yet he had gone up the water and not down.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIGHT OF THE CLOVEN KNOLL

AND now it was mid-April, and the goodman dight him to ride to a mote of the neighbours at a stead hight Bullmeads, where the Dalesmen were wont to gather in the spring, that they might ride thence all together to the town of Eastcheaping and sell the autumn clip of wool and do other chaffer. So the carle goes his ways alone, and will be one night at Bullmeads and two at Eastcheaping, and then another at Bullmeads, and be back on the fifth day. And when he was gone comes Stephen to Osberne, and says : “ Young master, I am going presently to the hill with the sheep, and thou needest neither to go with me nor fare a-hunting to-day, since the house is full of meat ; so thou art free, and were I in thy shoes I would go straight from this door down to the water-side, and see if thou mayst not happen on something fair or seldom seen. But hearken to my rede, if thou comest on aught such, thou hast no need to tell of it to any one, not even to me. [And it were not amiss to do on thy coat of scarlet.]”

Osberne thanks him, and takes his bow and arrows and goes his way and comes to the river-side and turns his face south, and goes slowly along the very edge of the water ; and the water itself drew his eyes down to gaze on the dark green deeps and fierce downlong

swirl of the stream, with its sharp clean lines as if they were carven in steel, and the curling and upheaval and sudden changing of the talking eddies : so that he scarce might see the familiar greensward of the further shore.

At last, when he had gone thus more than two miles from where he first hit the water, a long straight reach lay before him, and as he looked down it, it seemed as if the river came presently to an end ; but in sooth there was a sharp turn to the east by which the water ran, but narrowing much ; and this narrowing was made by the thrusting forth of the western bank into a sharp ness, which, from where Osberne now stood, showed a wide flank facing, as it seemed, the whole hurrying stream of the Flood. But the stream turned ere it smote the cliff, and striving for the narrow outgate made a prodigious eddy or whirlpool ere it might clear itself of the under-water foot of the ness and make eastward so as to rush on toward the sea. But in the face of the wall, in the bight where the whirlpool turned from it, was a cave the height of a tall man, and some four feet athwart, and below it a ledge thrust out from the sheer rock and hanging over the terrible water, and it was but a yard wide or so. It was but ten feet above the water, and from it to the grass above must have been a matter of forty foot. But the ness as it thrust forth into the river rose also, so that its crest was a score of feet higher where it went down into the water than its base amidst the green grass. Then came the strait passage of the water, some thirty yards across, and then the bank of the eastern side, which, though it thrust not out, but rather was as it were driven back by the stream, yet it rose toward the water, though not so much as the

ness over against it. It was as if some one had cast down a knoll across the Sundering Flood, and the stream had washed away the sloped side thereof, and then had sheared its way through by the east side where the ground was the softest. Forsooth so it seemed to the Dalesmen, for on either side they called it the Bight of the Cloven Knoll.

Osberne stood amazed right over against the cave in the cliff-side, and stared at the boiling waters beneath him, that seemed mighty enough to have made a hole in the ship of the world and sunk it in the deep. And he wondered at the cave, whether it were there by chance hap, or that some hands had wrought it for an habitation.

And as he stood gazing there, on a sudden there came out of the cave a shape as of man, and stood upon the ledge above the water, and the lad saw at once that it was a little maiden of about his own age, with ruddy golden hair streaming down from her head, and she was clad in a short coat of dark blue stuff and no more raiment, as far as he could see. Now as aforesaid Osberne was in his holiday raiment of red-scarlet by the bidding of Stephen. Now the maiden looks up and sees the lad standing on the eastern shore, and starts back astonished. Then she came forward again and looked under the sharp of her hand, for the sun shone from the south and was cast back dazzling from the water. There was but some thirty yards of water between them, but all gurgling and rushing and talking, so the child raised a shrill and clear voice as she clapped her hands together and cried: "O thou beauteous creature, what art thou?" Osberne laughed, and said in a loud voice: "I am a man, but young of years, so that they call

me a boy, and a bairn, and a lad. But what art thou ? ”

“ Nay, nay, ” she said, “ I must be nigher to thee ; it is over-wide here amidst the waters’ speech. Fare up to the top on thy side, and so will I. ” And there-with she turned about and fell to climbing up the side of the cliff by the broken black staves and the shaly slips. And though Osberne were a boy, yea and a tough one in some ways, he trembled and his heart beat quick to see the little creature wending that perilous upright road, and he might not take his eyes off her till she had landed safely on the greensward ; then he turned and went swiftly up the eastern knoll, and reached the edge of the sheer rock just as the maiden came running up the ness on her side.

He spake not, for he was eyeing her closely, and she might not speak a while for lack of breath. At last she said : “ Now are we as near to each other as we may be today ; yea for many days, or it may be for all our lives long : so now let us talk. ” She set her two feet together and held her hands in front of her, and so stood as if she looked for him to begin. But the words came not speedily to his mouth, and at last she said : “ I wonder why thou wilt not speak again ; for thy laugh was as the voice of a dear bird ; and thy voice is beauteous, so loud and clear. ”

He laughed, and said : “ Well then, I will speak. Tell me what thou art. Art thou of the Faery ? for thou art too well shapen to be of the Dwarf-kin. ” She clapped her hands together and laughed ; then she said : “ I laughed not as mocking thy question, but for joy to hear thy voice again. Nay, nay, I am no faery, but of the children of men. But thou, art thou not of the sons of the Land-wights ? ”

“No more than thou art,” said he. “I am a goodman’s son, but my father is dead, and my mother also, and I live at home at Wethermel up the water, with my grandsire and grandam.”

Said she: “Are they kind to thee?” The lad drew himself up: “I am kind to them,” said he. “How goodly thou art!” she said; “that was why I dreamed thou must be of the Land-wights, because I have seen divers men, some old, some young like to thee, but none half so goodly.” He smiled, and said: “Well, I thought thou wert of the Faery because thou art goodly and little. I have seen a pretty maid not long since, but she was older than thou, I deem, and far taller. But tell me, how old art thou?” She said: “When May is half worn I shall be of thirteen winters.”

“Lo now,” said he, “we be nigh of an age; I was thirteen in early April. But thou hast not told me where thou dwellest, and how.” She said: “I dwell at Hartshaw Knolls hard by. I am the daughter of a goodman, as thou art, and my father and mother are dead, so that my father I never saw, and now I dwell with my two aunts, and they be both older than was my mother.”

“Are they kind to thee?” said the lad, laughing that he must cast back her question. “Whiles,” said she, laughing also, “and whiles not: maybe that is because I am not always kind to them, as thou art to thy folk.” He answered nought, and she was silent a while; then he said: “What is in thy mind, maiden?” “This,” she said, “that I am thinking how fair a chance it was that I should have seen thee, for thou hast made me so glad.” Said he: “We can see each other again belike and make it less of a

chance." "O yea," she said, and was silent a while. Said he: "I wot not why it was that thou wert in the cave: and tell me, is it not exceeding perilous, the climbing up and down? why wilt thou do that? Also I must tell thee, that this was another cause why I thought thou wert of the Faery, that thou camest out of the cave."

Said she: "I will tell thee all about the cave; but first as to the peril of going thither and coming thence: wouldst thou be very sorry if I were lost on the way?" "Yea," said he, "exceeding sorry." "Well," said she, "then fear it not, for it is so much a wont of mine that to me there is no peril therein: yet am I glad that thou wert afraid for me." "I was sore afraid," said Osberne.

"Now as to the cave," said the maiden. "I found it out two years ago, when I was very little, and the women had been less than kind to me. And thither may I go whenas I would that they should seek me not; because folk say that it is a dwelling of the Dwarfs, and they fear to enter it. Besides, when I think of my kinswomen coming down the rock to find me therein, and they be tall, and one stiff, as if she were cut out of timber, and the other exceeding fat, that makes me merry!"

And therewith she sat down on the very edge of the cliff with her little legs hanging over the water, and laughed, rocking to and fro in her laughter, and Osberne laughed also. But he said: "But art thou not afraid of the Dwarfs?" She said: "Dear bairn or boy, I had been there many times before I heard tell of the Dwarfs, and I gat no harm, and after I had heard the tale I went still, and still gat no harm: nay I will tell thee somewhat; I gat gifts, or such they

seemed unto me. First I had to herd the sheep and take them to the best grass, and whiles they strayed and were wearisome to me, and I came home with divers missing, and then would I be wyted or even whipped for what was no fault of mine. And one such time I betook me to the cave and sat therein and wept, and complained to myself of my harm, and when I went out of the cave I saw on the ledge close to my foot a thing lying, and I took it up, and saw that it was a pipe with seven holes therein, and when I blew into it, it made sweet and merry little music. So I thought it great prize, and went away home with it, with all my sorrows well healed. But the next day I drave my sheep to grass, as my business was, and as oft happened, they strayed, and I followed them and gat nothing done; so I was weary, and afraid of what would betide at home in the stead. So I sat down on a stone, and when I had wept a little I thought I would comfort myself with the music of the pipe. But lo a wonder, for no sooner had a note or two sounded than all the sheep came running up to me, bleating and mowing, and would rub against my sides as I sat piping, and home I brought every head in all glee. And even so has it befallen ever since; and that was hard on a year agone. Fair boy, what dost thou think I am doing now?" Osberne laughed. "Disporting thee in speech with a friend," said he. "Nay," said she, "but I am shepherding sheep."

And she drew forth the pipe from her bosom and fell to playing it, and a ravishing sweet melody came thence, and so merry that the lad himself began to shift his feet as one moving to measure, and straightway he heard a sound of bleating, and sheep came

running toward the maiden from all about. Then she arose and ran to them, lest they should shove each other into the water ; and she danced before them, lifting up her scanty blue skirts and twinkling her bare feet and legs, while her hair danced about her, and the sheep, they too capered and danced about as if she had bidden them. And the boy looked on and laughed without stint, and he deemed it the best of games to behold. But when she was weary she came back to the head of the ness and sat down again as before, and let the sheep go where they would.

CHAPTER X

OSBERNE AND ELFHILD HOLD CONVERSE TOGETHER

So when she was rested she fell to speech again : “ Dear lad, this was the first gift, and I could not but deem that some one had heard me make my moan unseen and had given me that good gift. So what must I do but try it again, and one day I went down into the cave and fell to bewailing me that I had nought to deck me with, neither of gold nor silver, as other maidens had, for in sooth I had seen them with such things. And when I had done, I went forth on to the ledge, and this time I trod cautiously lest I should kick the dainty thing into the water, and lo, there lay this pretty thing.” And she drew forth from her bosom a necklace of gold and gems ; gold and emerald, gold and sapphire, gold and ruby ; and it flashed in the sun, and Osberne thought it a fair toy indeed, but knew not that scarce a queen had got aught so fair in her treasure. “ Ye may wot well

that I dare not show either this or the pipe to my aunts, who would have taken them away from me and cried horror at them ; for oft would they cry out at the evil things that dwelt in the ness and all the ills they brought on the children of men. So I play on the pipe when none are by, and I deck myself sitting in the sun with this fair necklace. Look thou, lad, for it is a joy to show me unto thee so decked." And she did back her raiment from her thin neck, and it was white as snow under the woollen, and she did on the necklace, and Osberne thought indeed that it sat well there, and that her head and neck looked grand and graithly.

Then she said : " One other gift I gat from these cave-folk, if there be such in the cave. On a day I was ailing, and could scarce hold up my head for weariness and sickness ; so I stole down hither and clomb with all trouble and peril down to the cave, and fell to bewailing my sickness, and scarce had I done ere I felt exceeding drowsy, and so laid me down on the floor of the cave and fell asleep there, feeling sick no longer even then. And when I awoke, after some three hours as I deemed, there was nought amiss with me, and I climbed up to grass again strong and merry, and making nought of the climb. And even so have I done once and again, and never have the good folk failed me herein. Hast thou ever had dealings with such-like creatures ? "

Osberne answered, and told her of his meeting with the Dwarf that time, and held up to her the whittle he had got, and flashed it in the sun ; and then he was about to tell her of Steelhead. But he remembered that he was scarce free to tell any one of him, so he held his peace thereof ; but he said : " Meseemeth,

maiden, that thou art not without might, such friends as thou hast. But tell me, what canst thou do beside the shepherding?" She said: "I can spin and weave, and bake the bread and make the butter, and grind meal at the quern; but the last is hard work, and I would not do it uncompelled, nor forsooth the indoor work either, for nought but the shepherding is to my mind. But now tell me, what canst thou do?" He said: "Meseems I cannot keep my sheep together so well as thou; but last autumn I learned how to slay wolves that would tear the sheep."

She rose up as if to look at him the better, and strained her hands together hard, and gazed eagerly at him. He saw that she was wondering at him and praising him, so he said lightly: "It is no so great a matter as some think; what is most needed is a good heart and a quick eye. Thus I slew the three of them."

"O," she said, "now I know that thou art that fair child and champion of whom I have heard tell, that thy deed was a wonder; and now thou art so kind that thou wilt wear the day talking to a poor and feeble maiden."

Said he: "I do that because it is my will and it pleases me to see thee and talk to thee, for thou art good to look at and dear."

Then she said: "But what else canst thou do, Champion?" Said he: "Of late I am thought to be somewhat deft at shooting in the bow, so that whatso I aim at, that I hit. Thus I am not like to lack for meat." "Yea," she said, "but that is wonderful; and besides, now canst thou shoot at the wolves from afar without their being able to come at

thee to bite thee. But now it is hard to get thee to tell of thy prowess, and I must ask after every deal. Tell me of something else." Quoth he: "At home they deem me somewhat of a scald, so that I can smithy out staves." She clapped her hands together and cried: "Now that is good indeed, since thou canst also slay wolves. But how sweet it would be for me to have thee making a stave before me now. Wouldst thou?"

"I wot not," he said, laughing; "but let me try." So he sat down and fell to conning his rhymes, while she stood looking on from across the water. At last he stood up and sang:

Now the grass groweth free
 And the lily's on lea,
 And the April-tide green
 Is full goodly beseen,
 And far behind,
 Lies the winter blind,
 And the lord of the Gale
 Is shadowy pale;

And thou, linden be-blossomed, with bed of the worm
 Camest forth from the dark house as spring from the
 storm.

O barm-cloth tree,
 The light is in thee,
 And as spring-tide shines
 Through the lily lines,
 So forth from thine heart
 Through thy red lips apart
 Came words and love
 To wolf-bane's grove,

And the shaker of battle-board blesseth the Earth
 For the love and the longing, kind craving and mirth.

May I forget
The grass spring-wet
And the quivering stem
On the brooklet's hem,
And the brake thrust up
And the saffron's cup,
Each fashioned thing
From the heart of Spring,
Long ere I forget it, the house of thy word
And the doors of thy learning, the roof of speech-board.

When thou art away
In the winter grey,
Through the hall-reek then
And the din of men
Shall I yet behold
Sif's hair of gold
And Hild's bright feet,
The battle-fleet,
And from threshold to hearthstone, like as songs of the
South,
To and fro shall be fleeting the words of thy mouth.

Then his song dropped down, and they stood looking silently at each other, and tears ran over the little maiden's cheeks. But she spake first and said: "Most lovely is thy lay, and there is this in it, that I see thou hast made it while thou wert sitting there, for it is all about thee and me, and how thou lovest me and I thee. And full surely I know that thou wilt one day be a great and mighty man. Yet this I find strange in thy song almost to foolishness, that thou speakest in it as I were a woman grown, and thou a grown man, whereas we be both children. And look, heed it, what sunders us, this mighty Flood, which hath been from the beginning and shall be to the end."

He answered not a while, and then he said: "I might not help it; the words came into my mouth, and meseems they be better said than unsaid. Look to it if I do not soon some deed such as bairns be not used to doing." "That I deem is like to be," she said, "yet it shall be a long time ere folk shall call us man and woman. But now, fair child, I must needs go homeward, and thou must let me go or I shall be called in question." "Yea," said Osberne, "yet I would give thee a gift if I might, but I know not what to give thee save it were my Dwarf-wrought whittle." She laughed and said: "That were a gift for a man but not for me; keep it, dear and kind lad. I for my part were fain of giving thee somewhat: but as for my pipe, I fear me that I could never throw it across the water. I would I might reach thee with my gold and gem necklace, but I fear for it lest the Sundering Flood devour it. What shall I do then?"

"Nought at all, dear maiden," said the lad, "I would no wise take thy pipe from thee, which saveth thee from blame and beating; and as to the necklace, that is woman's gear even as the whittle is man's. Keep it safe till thou art become a great lady."

"Well," she said, "now let me go; it almost seems to me as I might not till thou hast given me leave."

"Yea," said he; "but first, when shall I come to see thee again, and thou me? Shall it be tomorrow?"

"O nay," she said, "it may not be, lest they take note of me if I come down here over often. Let it be after three days first: and then the next time it must be longer." Quoth Osberne: "Let the next time take care of itself; but I will come in three days. Now I bid thee depart, and I will go home; but I would kiss thee were it not for the Sundering Flood." "That

is kind and dear of thee," said the maiden. "Farewell, and forget me not in three days, since thou hast sung that song to me." "I shall not forget so soon," said he. "Farewell!"

She turned about and ran down the ness with the pipe in her hand, and Osberne heard the sweet voice of the pipe thereafter, and the bleating of the sheep and the paddling of their hoofs as they all ran toward her, and he went his ways home with all that in his ears, and was well content with his day's work; and he deemed that he understood the rede which Steelhead had given him. Withal he had an inkling that Stephen the Eater was somehow his friend in more special way than he was to the rest of the household; so he came home to Wethermel in good case.

CHAPTER XI

OSBERNE SHOOTS A GIFT ACROSS THE FLOOD

Now when the three days were over he went his ways to the Bight of the Cloven Knoll, and Stephen smiled and nodded to him friendly as he went out of the door, and once more he was clad in his red-scarlet raiment. He had his bow in his hand, and besides the three arrows which the hillman had given, he had two others out of the goodman's quiver. Moreover he had thought over from time to time what he might give to the maiden, and now he had in his pouch a fair gold piece which his mother had given him when he was yet very young, and he thought that this were a fair gift might he but get it over to the other side of the Sundering Flood.

Now when he was within eyeshot of the ness he

looked thither, and saw a little figure on the crest thereof, and knew that the maiden had prevented him and was there already, so he hastened all he might to his own vantage ground, and straightway he gave her the sele of the day, and she greeted him kindly. Then he looks and sees that she is somewhat decked out for this meeting, for not only did the Dwarf's gift, the necklace, gleam and glitter on her little flat child's bosom, but also she had made her a wreath for her head of the spring flowers, and another had she done about her loins. She stood there saying nothing a while, and it seemed to him that she was waiting for him to praise this new-wrought adornment. So he said : " Thou art in fairer guise than when first I saw thee ; is there any high-tide toward at thy stead ? "

" Nay," she said ; " I did this because I looked to see thee today, whereas the other time we happed on each other unawares. But hast thou done any more great deeds ? "

He laughed and said : " Nay, nay, let me grow a few days older yet. Nevertheless there is this new thing, that this morning I have brought thee a gift which I deem I may flit to thee, and I shall give it to thee with a good will if thou wilt promise that thou wilt not part with it ever."

" With all my heart will I promise that," she said ; " but tell me what it is ; show it to me."

He drew it forth and held it up between his finger and thumb, and said : " It is a golden penny, very fair, and I deem it comes from some far country. My mother gave it to me when I was very young ; yet I remember that she bade me part not with it, save I should give it to one unto whom I wished all luck, for that she deemed that luck went with it. Now thou

art so fair and so dear, and my only fellow of a like age, that I wish luck to thee as much as luck can be found : so I will flit it to thee this wise, that I will do it up in a piece of cloth and tie it to the head of this arrow (which is of no account), and shoot it over to thee." And therewith he knelt down and fell to wrapping it up in the rag.

As for the maiden, she was all eager, and quivering with joy at the getting of such a gift ; yet she spake and said : " O how good thou art to me : yet I deem not that thou shouldst give me thy mother's gift. And moreover why shouldst thou shoot away thy luck ? It may be that I am not doomed to be lucky, as surely thou art ; and it may well be that thou mayst give me thy luck and make thee less lucky, without eking mine, if unluck be my weird."

Now though he had set his heart on giving the gold to the fair child, yet her words seemed wise to him, and he said : " What then shall we do ? " She said : " Abide a while till I think of it."

So they were silent a while, both of them, till the little maid looked up and said : " Is it a round thing ? " " Yea," said he. " What is there upon it ? " she said. Quoth Osberne : " On one side be two warriors, and on the other the Rood and certain letters."

She thought again and said : " How much were it marred if it were halved, one warrior and half a cross ? " He said : " That hangs upon this, who has one half and who the other." She said : " How would it be, since I can see that thou wishest that I should share thy gift, and belike thy luck also, if thou wert to do it into two halves, and keep one thyself and shoot me the other over the flood ? " He leapt up and fell a-dancing for joy as she spake, and cried out :

“O, but thou art wise! Now I can see that this is what my mother meant me to do, to share the gold and the luck.”

Therewith he took the penny out of its wrapping and drew forth his whittle, and gat a big stone and set the gold on the steel and smote it, deftly enough; for he was no ill smith for his years. Then he stood up and cried out: “There, it is done, and neither of the warriors is scathed, for there was a waste place betwixt them. Now then for the shaft and the bow!” The maiden looked eagerly with knitted brows, and soon saw Osberne take up the shaft and nock it on the bow-string.

Then he said: “Take heed and stand still and the halfling shall be thine. Look now, I will send the shaft so that it shall go in the grass-grown cleft betwixt the two big stones behind thee to thy right hand.” He raised his bow therewith, and saw how she gathered her skirts about her, as if she would not have them hinder the shaft. Then he loosed, and the shaft flew, but she abode still a little; and he laughed and said: “Go, maiden, and find the shaft and the gold.” Then she turned and ran to the cleft, and took out the arrow, and did off the wrapping with trembling fingers and gat the gold and looked on it, and cried out: “O the fair warrior! such like shalt thou be one day upon a penny, dear child.”

Then she came forward again and said: “Now this is strange, that neither last time nor now have we told each other our names: now I will tell thee that my name is Elfhild, of Hartshaw Knolls. What is thine?”

“Elfhild my child,” said he, “my name is Osberne Wulfgrim’s son, and I am of Wethermel, as I told thee. Yet belike it is not so strange that we have not told

our names hitherto, and I hope no ill-luck will go with our telling them, for I suppose that people give each other names when there are many of them, and they would know one from another. But as to us, there be only two of us, so that if I call thee Maiden, and thou call me Swain, it had been enough. Nevertheless I am fain of calling thee Elfhild."

"And I am full fain of calling thee Osberne," she said. "Besides, if at any time both thou and I were to depart from this country-side we might chance to meet amongst folk of many names, and thus we might the better know each other—But O!" she said, growing exceeding eager, "dost thou know how good a gift thou hast given me? for the halves of the penny, we shall both keep them for ever, as thou knowest, and by our having them we shall know each other if we meet in the world without and our faces have become changed."

Said Osberne: "I deem not that my face will change very much, at least not till I grow old—nor do I think that thine will either." She laughed merrily: "O bairn Osberne, when thou art become a man and a great man, and art called maybe Earl Osberne Wulfgrimsson, will not thy face have changed, and thou with the beard and the fierce eyes, and the mouth that hath shouted in the battle? As for me, Allhallows grant it that my face may change: look at me, a kind of red crow now, all skinny and spindle-legged, and yet I may grow to be a fair woman; and then indeed I should be fain for thee to see me. For somehow it seems to be shown to me that thou wilt be loved of women and love them somewhat over-much."

"For my part," said Osberne, "I seem to see of myself that I shall have much to do slaying wolves

and evil things, and standing before kings and getting gifts of them, so that there will be little time for me to go about loving women—yet thee I shall ever love, Elfhild.” And he reddened as he spake this, as though he were a youth before his time. But Elfhild said: “In all ways thou art kind to me, and thee shall I ever love. But now tell me, Osberne, what wouldst thou have me do today to make game and play for thee?” Said he: “Call up the sheep again to thee with the sweet little pipe, for therein is much game.” She nodded her head merrily, and drew forth her pipe and played, and the sheep came bundling up as the day before; and she danced and played a long while, and Osberne clapped his hands and laughed and egged her on, and was full fain of her dancing, and forsooth it was a wonder and delight to see her.

At last she was wearied out, and cast herself on the grass at the very edge of the cliff, and said that she could no more. And Osberne thanked her kindly.

So when she had gotten her breath again, she asked him what next she should do for his disport. And he bade tell him of how she lived with those two women, her aunts, and what she did from day to day. So she sat down as on the other day, with her legs hanging down over the grisly flood, and told him full sweetly of her joys and her work and her troubles. And some of the tale was piteous enough, for the two kinswomen, who were by no means old, for the eldest was only of thirty summers, were somewhat hard with the child and right careless of her, as shall be shown afterwards.

But after a little she broke off and said: “But Osberne, dear, these be no fair tales for thee, though

thou art kind to hearken to them. I have better tales than that, of champions to wit, and ladies and castles and dragons and the like, that I have heard ; some of my kinswomen, some of folk that come to our house at a pinch, for it is a poor house ; and some, yea and most and the best, from an old woman who dwelleth in a cot not far from us. And she loveth me and hath learned me much lore ; and I will tell thee thereof if thou wilt hearken."

"I will well," said he, "and thanks thou shalt have of me ; I would I might give thee some other gift." She said : "My tale reward will be that thou shalt tell me over and over the staves thou madest last time we met, till I have them by heart. And other staves shalt thou make for me if thou wilt." "Thus is the bargain struck," said the lad, "now get thee to the work."

So the little maiden fell to telling him a tale of the Faery, and when it was done he asked for another ; but this was a long one, and wore the day down, so that Elfhild must needs depart ere it was done. Then was a talk of when the next meeting should be, and to Osberne nought was near enough save tomorrow. But Elfhild said that it was nought safe, lest aught should wake up her kinswomen to asking of her whereabouts, and again the meeting was appointed for three days thence ; but had it not been for the tale, for which something must be risked, Elfhild said that the time between must be a week. So each of the children departed to their houses well pleased.

CHAPTER XII

OF A GUEST CALLED WAYWEARER

Now hereafter all went the same way, that from time to time they met on either side the Sundering Flood, save that Osberne came not ever in his fair-dyed raiment, but was mostly clad in russet ; but on Elfhild's birthday he was clad in his best. Otherwise nought befel to tell of. Whiles either of the children were ailing, whiles Elfhild was kept at home by her kinswomen, and so they failed each other, but never by their own will. The one who came to the trysting-place and missed the other was sore grieved, and in special Osberne, whose child's heart swelled nigh to bursting with sorrow mingled with wrath, and at such times the Sundering Flood seemed to him like the coils of a deadly serpent which was strangling the life out of him, and he would wend home in all despair.

So wore the days through spring and summer and early autumn, and at Wethermel all went smoothly, and the goodman there was better pleased than ever with his new man, who, if he ate two men's victuals, did three men's work ; as for Osberne, he loved Stephen dearly, and Stephen for his part was for ever doing something for his disport, and in two ways in special. For first he was, like Elfhild, stuffed with all kinds of tales and histories, and oft when they were out a-shepherding he would tell these to Osberne day long ; and not unseldom when the tale was under way the lad would cry out : " Fair is thy tale, but I have heard it before, only it is different thus and thus." And in sooth he had heard it from Elfhild. The other

matter was that Stephen was a smith exceeding deft, and learned the craft to Osberne, so that by the end of the year he bade fair to be a good smith himself. Moreover, whiles would Stephen take a scrap of iron and a little deal of silver, as a silver penny or a florin, from out of his hoard, and would fashion it into an ouch or chain or arm-ring, so quaintly and finely that it was a joy to look on. And every one of these good things would Stephen give to Osberne with a friendly grin, and Osberne took them with a joyful heart because now he had a new thing to give to Elfhild, and each one he shot across the river unto her the soonest that he might. But whiles, when his heart was full, Osberne would say to the smith: "Thou givest me so much, and doest so well by me, that I know not how ever I am to make it good to thee." And Stephen would say: "Fear not, master, the time will come when thou mayst do such good to me as shall pay for all at once."

Now befel tidings on a day of the beginning of October; for the wind, which had been high and blustering all day, grew greater and greater by then candles were lighted in the hall, till it was blowing a great gale from the south-west, which seemed like to lift the house-roof. Then befel a knocking on the house-door, and Stephen went thereto and opened it, and came back with a man all dripping and tousled with the storm. He was a tall man, yellow-haired, and goodly both of face and body, but his face much hidden with a beard untrimmed, and he was clad in rags which scarce held together, and never a shoe had he to his foot: yet was he bold and free of mien despite his poor attire. He carried some long thing under his arm wrapped up in cloth which was bound

about with twine and sealed every here and there with yellow wax.

The goodman started up when he came in, and made as if he would have the newcomer put out, and he muttered: "We keep no house for the harbouring of runagates." Yet he looked at Osberne withal, for he was now grown so masterful that nought was done in the house without him; and the lad stood up straightway and came to the newcomer and bade him welcome from out the storm. Then he took him by the hand and led him up to the hearth, and spake to his grandam: "Goodwife, this our guest has been in rough weather without, and ere he sits down to meat with us, it were well to take him into the inner chamber and wash his feet, and find him dry raiment." The goodwife looked kindly on the guest and bade him come with her, and he went; but ere his back was turned Osberne looked on him and caught a glance of his eye, and therewith he was sure that despite his rags and wretchedness this was his friend Steelhead. In a while he came back into the hall, clad and shod as well as might be done in a hurry, and Osberne led him into his own seat at the board, and gave him to drink; and Stephen withal served him with all care, so that he was in an hospitable house, save that the goodman cast somewhat grudging glances on him, but whereas he might not gainsay all the rest of his household, there was little scathe therein.

But when the guest sat down, he took that long bundle and gave it into Osberne's hands, and said: "Thou art so friendly to a gangrel man, that I make bold to ask this grace of thee also, to wit that thou wilt heed this bundle, and let none other touch it, and give it back to me tomorrow morning ere I depart."

Osberne yeasaid to that and took the bundle and laid it at his bed-head. And therewith the meat was brought in, and the meal was merry ; for now the guest seemed so noble-looking a man and so cheerful of countenance and so debonair, that none save the goodman thought any longer of his rags wherewith he had come into the hall out of the storm. But even the goodman was better with him presently, when he saw that though he ate and drank like a tall man, he needed no such abundance for the filling of his maw as did Stephen.

Ere they began drinking the guest said : " I may as well tell you folks my name, since ye are so good to me, and have not asked for it, and ye must know that I am called Waywearer, and that I wish increase of good unto this house."

Then the cup went round and they drank late into the night, and when they had drunk the voidee cup, Osberne led the newcomer to the guest-chamber, and kissed him with good-night, but made no show of knowing who he was.

CHAPTER XIII

STEELHEAD GIVES OSBERNE THE SWORD BOARD- CLEAVER

WHEN morning was, the guest came into the hall and found the household there, and he spake to the good-wife and said : " Dame, I would have done off this raiment which ye lent me last night and done on mine and left thine lying there, but mine I might not find."

" Nor thou nor anyone else," she said, " shall find

thy rags any more, good guest, unless they come to life when thou risest from the dead on the day of doom ; for I have peaceably burned them in the garth this hour ago. God help us if the stead of Wethermel cannot spare a yard or two of home-spun to a guest who cometh in stripped by the storm." The guest nodded kindly to her ; but Osberne said : " Which way ridest thou this morning, guest, for I would fain lead thee a little way ? " " I wend south from thy door, fair master," said the newcomer ; " but as to riding, 't is Shanks' mare must be my way-beast, unless I go stealing a horse."

" There is no need for that," said Osberne, " we can find thee a good horse, and if thou bringest him not back it will be no loss to us, as the less hay-need we shall have through winter. Stephen, go thou and see to it that the horses be ready saddled and bridled when we have eaten a morsel." The guest laughed and looked to the carle-master, and said : " How sayest thou, goodman, is the gift given ? " The carle smiled somewhat ruefully, and said : " The gift is given ; and soothly it is for the youngling to give since all will come to him, be it more or less." " I will take it then," said the guest, " since good will goeth with it ; but look to it, goodman, if I reward thee not therefor, for as ragged as I came into thine house."

Now therewith they break their fast ; and the last night's wind has fallen utterly, and the sky is blue and the sun bright, and it is warm for that season. Then Osberne gives the sealed bundle to Waywearer, and he took it and did it on to his saddle-bow, and he mounts, and Osberne also, who is dight in his fair-hued raiment ; and they set out up the dale, and ride swiftly, and are few-spoken together.

So they rode till they were past the last house, the cot to wit above told of, and then they came into a fair little clough with a bright stream running through it toward the Sundering Flood ; and there were bushes and small wood up and down the clough, and there Waywearer, that is to say, Steelhead, drew rein, and said to Osberne : “ Meseems this is as far as thou needest lead me out, lad, so let us off horse and go down and sit by the brook.”

So they did, and tied their horses to a thorn-bush growing thereby ; and Waywearer took the bundle off his horse and said to Osberne : “ Hast thou any guess at what this good thing is ? ” Osberne reddened and said : “ That is the sword which thou didst promise me last spring.” Waywearer laughed and said : “ Sharp are thine eyes to see a sword through all this wrappage of cerecloth ; surely they be of the warrior kin. But sooth hast thou said ; this is thy sword.” And therewith he fell to undoing the cloth, while the boy looked on eagerly.

At last the hilts and the sheath showed naked : the pommel and cross were of gold of beauteous and wonderful fashion, such as no smith may work now, and the grip was wrapped about with golden wire. And the sheath wherein lay the deadly white edges was of brown leather of oxhide, studded about with knops of gold and silver, and the peace-strings were of scarlet silk with golden acorns at the ends.

Said Osberne : “ O thou art kind to have brought this for me : and may I handle it now and at once ? ”

“ Yea,” said Steelhead smiling ; “ but beware, beware ! ” for he saw the lad lay his hand to the peace-strings ; “ do not away the peace-strings, lest thou be tempted to draw forth the blade. For this

sword is hight Boardcleaver, and was fashioned by the fathers of long ago ; and so wise is he and so eager, that whensoever he cometh forth from the sheath he will not go back again till he hath had a life. So beware ever, for mickle scathe shall come of it if he see the heavens and the earth for light cause."

Somewhat daunted was the bold lad ; but he said : " Tell me, thou bright lord, at what times I shall draw forth Boardcleaver."

Said Steelhead : " Only then when thou hast the foe before thee : then draw and be of good courage, for never shall point and edge be dulled by the eye-shot of the wicked and wizards, as whiles it befals the common blades of today. For a man of might hath breathed on the edges amidst much craft of spells, so that nought may master that blade, save one of its brethren fashioned by the same hands, if such there be yet upon the earth, whereof I misdoubt me. Now then thou hast the sword ; but I lay this upon thee therewith, that thou be no brawler nor make-bate, and that thou draw not Boardcleaver in any false quarrel, or in behalf of any tyrant or evil-doer, or else shall thy luck fail thee despite the blade that lieth hidden there. But meseemeth nought shalt thou be of the kind of these wrong-doers. And I say of thee that thou didst well with me last night. For though thou knewest me presently, and that I was not without might, yet at first, when thou tookest me by the hand and leddest me to the fire before all the house, thou knewest me not, and I was to thee but the ragged gangrel body whom thy grandsire would have thrust forth into the storm again ; but thou didst to me no worse than if I had been lord and earl."

Now it is to be told, that when Osberne heard these

words then first he knew what praise was, and the heart glowed within him, and valiancy grew up therein, and his face was bright and his eyes glistened with tears ; and he spake no word aloud, but he swore to himself that he would be no worse than his friend Steelhead would have him to be.

Then he took the sword and girt it to him ; and he said : “ Master, this is no long sword, but it is great and heavy, and meseemeth my bairn’s might may never wield it. Shall I not lay it by till I become a man ? ”

“ That shall be seen to, fair youngling,” said Steelhead. “ In an hour thou shalt have might enough to wield Boardcleaver, though doubtless thy might shall be eked year by year and month by month thereafter.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE GIFTS OF STEELHEAD

Now by then it was high noon, and the sun very hot, and as they lay on the grass after this converse the lad looked on the water, and he was besweated, and longed for the bright pools of the stream, after the manner of boys ; and he said at last : “ I were fain to take to the water this hot noon, if it please thee.”

“ It is well thought of, lad,” said Steelhead, “ and that the more, as I must needs see thee naked if I am to strengthen thee as I am minded to do.” So they did off their raiment, both of them, and went into the biggest of the pools hard by ; and if Steelhead were a noble-looking man clad, far nobler was he to look on naked, for he was both big and well shapen, so that better might not be. As for Osberne, there looked

but little of him when he was unclad, as is the fashion of lads to be lank, yet for his age he was full well shapen. So Steelhead came out of the water presently, and clad himself, while Osberne yet played a while. Then Steelhead called the lad to him all naked as he was, and said: "Stand thou before me, youngling, and I will give thee a gift which shall go well with Board-cleaver." And the lad stood still before him, and Steelhead laid his hands on the head of him first, and let them abide there a while; then he passed his hands over the shoulders and arms of the boy, and his legs and thighs and breast, and all over his body; and therewith he said: "In our days and the olden time it was the wont of fathers to bless their children in this wise; but for thee, thy father is dead, and thy nighest kinsman is little-hearted and somewhat of a churl. Thus then have I done to thee to take the place of a father to thee, I who am of the warriors of while agone. And I think it will avail thee; and it is borne in upon me that before very long thou wilt need this avail, if thou art to live and do the deeds I would have thee. Now it is done, so cover thee in thy raiment and rest a while; and then I will depart and leave thee to the might which I have given thee, and the valiance which hath grown up in thine heart."

So they lay down on the greensward and rested; and Osberne had fetched along with him cakes and cheese and a keg of good drink, and they took their bever there in all content. But for that time Steelhead spake no more of his folk and the old days, but about the fowl and fish and other wild things that haunted that clough, and of shooting in the bow and so forth. Then they arose and went to their horses, and Steelhead said to Osberne: "How is it with the

might of thy body, lad? Canst thou do better in wielding of Boardcleaver?" So the youngling stretched himself and took the sword by the hilts and shook it and waved it about, and tossed it in the air and caught it again, and said: "Seest thou, master? Meseems my might is so much eked, that I deem I could swim the stream of the Sundering Flood and overcome it." Quoth the hillman, laughing: "Yea, and we know that that would please thee well; but let it be, my son, I bid thee; for no race of folk who have dwelt in the Dale from the beginning of the world have ever won across the Sundering Flood. So now we depart for this present; but as for this way-beast I ride, thy grandsire shall lose nothing and gain much by him; for I took him but to pleasure thee, and I shall send him back to Wethermel ere many days are past. Farewell, my son!"

So he kissed the youngling, and rode away south across the stream and over the other side of the clough. Osberne stood beside his horse, looking after him and the way he had taken, and then mounted and rode his way homeward, somewhat downcast at first for the missing of this new father. But after a while, what for his new gift and his freshly-gained might, and the pride and pleasure of life, he became all joyous again, as though the earth were new made for him.

Ye may well think that the very next time (which indeed was on the morrow) that Osberne went to the Bight of the Cloven Knoll, he went girt with Boardcleaver, and showed it to his friend; and she looked somewhat sober at the sight of it, and said: "I pray thee, Osberne, draw it not forth from the sheath." "In nowise may I draw it," said he, "for I am told never to draw it till I have my foe before me; for ever

it will have a life betwixt the coming forth from the sheath and its going back again." "I fear me," she said, "that thou wilt have to draw it often, so that many a tale will be told of it, and perhaps at last the death of thee." And therewith she put her hands up to her face and wept. But he comforted her with kind words, till the tears were gone.

Then she looked at him long and lovingly, and said at last: "I know not how it is, but thou seemest to me changed and grown less like a child, as though some new might had come to thee. Now I may not ask thee who has done this to thee, and given thee the sword, for if thou mightest thou wouldst have told me. But tell me this, hast thou all this from a friend or a foe?" He said: "Dost thou indeed see that I am grown mightier? Well, it is so; and true it is that I may not tell thee who is the giver; but I may tell thee that it is a friend. But art thou not glad of my gain?" She smiled and said: "I should be glad, and would be if I might; but somehow meseemeth that thou growest older quicker than I do, and that it is ill for me, for it will sunder us more than even now we be sundered."

And again he had to comfort her with sweet words; and he shot across to her an ouch which Stephen had given him that morning, so soon she was herself again, and sat and told him a tale of old times; and they parted happily, and Osberne gat him home to Wethermel. But he had scarce been at home a minute or two when there came one riding to the door, a young man scarlet-clad and gay, and his horse was dight with the goodliest of saddles and bridles, and the bit of silver; but for all that, both Osberne and Stephen, who was standing in the door, knew the horse for their

own nag, on whom Waywearer had ridden off the yestermorn.

Now the lad cries out : " Is this the stead of Wethermel ? " " Yea," said Osberne ; " what wouldst thou ? " " I would see the goodman," says the swain. " He is yet afield," said Osberne, " but if thou wilt come in and have the bite and the sup thou mayst abide him, for he will not be long."

" I may not," said the swain, " for time fails me ; so I will say to thee what I was to say to him, which is no long spell, to wit that Waywearer sendeth home the horse the goodman lent him, and bids him keep the gear on him in his memory." Therewith is he off the horse in a twinkling and out through the garth gate, and away so swiftly that they lost sight of him in a moment. Stephen laughed and said to Osberne : " Waywearer is nowise debt-tough ; now will our goodman be glad tonight. But see thou ! look to the nag's shoes ! If ever I saw silver to know it, they be shod therewith." And so it was as he said, and the silver nigh an inch thick.

Soon cometh home the goodman, and they tell him the tidings, and he grows wondrous glad, and says that luck has come to Wethermel at last. But thereafter they found that horse much bettered, so that he was the best nag in all the Wethermel pastures.

CHAPTER XV

SURLY JOHN BRINGS A GUEST TO WETHERMEL

WEAR the days now till it is the beginning of winter, and there is nought new to tell of, till on a day when it began to dusk, and all the household were gathered

in the hall, one knocked at the door, and when Stephen went thereto, who should follow him in save Surly John, and with him a stranger, a big tall man, dark-haired and red-bearded, wide-visaged, brown-eyed and red-cheeked, blotch-faced and insolent of bearing. He was girt with a sword, had a shield at his back and bore a spear in his hand, and was clad in a long byrny down to his knees. He spake at once in a loud voice, ere Surly John got out the word: "May Hardcastle be here to-night, ye folk?" The goodman quaked at the look and the voice of him, and said: "Yea, surely, lord, if thou wilt have it so."

But Osberne turned his head over his shoulder, for his back was toward the door, and said: "Meat and drink and an ingle in the hall are free to every comer to this house, whether he be earl or churl." Hardcastle scowled on the lad, and said: "I am neither earl nor churl, but a man of mine own hand, and I take thy bidding, goodman, for this night, but as to thereafter we will look to it; but as to thy youngling, I will look to him at once and teach him a little manners." And therewith he went up to Osberne and smote him a cheek-slap from behind. Surly John laughed, and made a mow at him, and said: "Ho! young wolf-slayer, feelest thou that? Now is come the end of thy mastery!" But neither for slap nor for gibe did Osberne flinch one whit, or change countenance.

Then Hardcastle said: "Hah! is that the lad who slew the wolves ye ran from, John? He will be a useful lad about the house." John held his peace and reddened somewhat, and Hardcastle said: "Now show me where to bestow this fighting-gear of mine; for meseems I shall not want it yet awhile in this

meek and friendly house." Quoth Osberne over his shoulder : " Things boded will happen, and also things unboded." Hardcastle scowled again, but this time smote him not, for he was busy doing off his hawberk, which Stephen took from him presently, along with his other armour and weapons, and hung them upon the pins at the other end of the hall. Then he came back and stood before Hardcastle as if waiting some commandment, but the warrior said : " Who is this big lubber here, and what is his name ? What does the fool want ?" Said Stephen : " I want to serve thee, noble sir, and my name is Stephen the Eater ; but I can swallow most things better than hard words." Hardcastle lifted up his right foot to kick his backside, but Stephen deftly thrust out his right foot and gave the man a shove on his breast, so that he tripped him and down went Hardcastle bundling. He picked himself up in a mighty rage, and would have fallen on Stephen ; but he saw that the Eater had a broad and big knife in his girdle, so he forbore, being now all unarmed ; and Stephen said : " Our floor is somewhat slippery for dancing, fair sir."

But therewith arose Osberne, and came before the guest, and louted to him and said : " Noble sir, I pray thee pardon our man Stephen, for thou seest how clumsy a man he is, and he knoweth not where to bestow his long legs ; he is ever in everyone's way." And as he spake the smiles wère all over his face, and he louted low again. Stephen stared astonished at him and drew back, and as for Hardcastle, the wrath ran off him, and he looked on Osberne and said : " Nay, thou art not so unmannerly a lad as I deemed ; belike I shall yet make something out of thee."

Therewith the meat was borne in and they all sat

to table, and Hardcastle was well at ease ; and the goodman, if he were not quite happy, yet made a shift to seem as if he were. The guest sat at the right hand of the goodman, and after he had eaten a while he said : “ Goodman, thy women here have doubtless once been fair, but now they are somewhat stricken in years. Hast thou in hiding somewhere, or belike lying out in the field or at some cot, anything prettier ? something with sleek sides and round arms and dainty legs and feet ? It would make us merrier, and belike kinder, if such there were.”

The goodman turned pale, and stammered out that these were all the women at Wethermel ; and John cried out : “ It is even as I told thee, warrior. Heed it not ; there be fair women up and down the Dale, and thou shalt have one or two of these with little pains, either for love or for fear.” Hardcastle laughed and said : “ Thou shalt go and fetch them for me, Surly John, and see which shall serve thee best, love or fear.” All laughed thereat, for they well knew his ill temper and his cowardice, and he turned red and blue for rage. But as for Osberne, he could not help thinking of the pretty maid whose hand he had held at the Cloven Mote last winter ; and he thought that if Hardcastle did her any wrong, Boardcleaver might well look on the sun in her behalf.

A little after Osberne turns to John and sees his knife lying on the board, a goodly one, well carven on the heft. So he says : “ Thy whittle seems to me both good and strange, John, reach it into my hand.” John did so, and the youngling takes hold of it by the back near the point with his thumb and finger, and twists it till it is like a ram’s horn. Then he gives it back to John and says : “ Thy knife is now stranger

than it was, John, but 't is not of so much use as erst." All marvelled at this feat, all save the fool Surly John, who raises a great outcry that his knife is marred. But Hardcastle, whose head was now pretty much filled with drink, cried out: "Hold thy peace, John; doubtless this youngling here hath craft enough to straighten thy whittle even as he has crooked and winded it. By the mass he is a handy smith, and will be of much avail to me." Osberne reached out his hand for the knife, and John gave it to him, and he took it by the point as aforetime, and lo, in a moment it was once more straight again, so to say. Then he hands it back to John, and says: "Let our man Stephen lay his hammer on the blade tomorrow once or twice, and thy knife shall be as good as ever it was." All wondered, but Hardcastle not much, whereas by this time he could not see very straight out of his eyes. So he bids lead him to bed, and the goodman took him by the hand and brought him to the guest-chamber, and himself lies down in an angle of the hall. So all lay down, and there was rest in the house the night long; save for the goodman, who slept but little, and that with dreams of the cutting of throats and firing of roofs.

CHAPTER XVI

HARDCASTLE WOULD SEIZE WETHERMEL

WHEN it was morning, and folk were afoot in the house, Hardcastle lay long abed; but when the first meal was on the board, and they were gathered in hall, he came thereto, and sat down and ate without a word and was by seeming as surly as John. But when the boards

were taken up, and the women at least, though not the others, I deem, were looking that he should call for his horses and depart, he leaned back in his high-seat and spake slowly and lazily : “ This stead of Wethermel is much to my mind ; it is a plenteous house and good land, and more plenteous it might be made were I to cast a dyke and a wall round about, and have in here a sort of good fellows who should do my bidding, so that we might help ourselves to what we lacked where plenty was to be had. I will think of this hereafter, but at this present, and till winter is done and spring is come, I will say no more of that. And to you folk, even to the big lubber yonder, I will say this, that ye, women and all, shall be free of meat and drink and bed if ye will but be brisk about doing my will, and will serve me featly ; but if not, then shall ye pack and be off, and have no worse harm of me. Have ye heard, and will ye obey ? ”

The women were pale and trembled, and the goodman quaked exceedingly, while Surly John stood by grinning. Osberne smiled pleasantly but spake not. He was girt with the sword Boardcleaver and clad in scarlet. As for Stephen, he stood before Hardcastle with a face seeming solemn, save that he squinted fearfully, looking all down along his long nose.

Now came forth the goodman and knelt before the ruffler, and said : “ Lord, we will even do thy will : but mightest thou tell us where ye got licence and title to take all our wealth from us and make us thy thralls ? ” The warrior laughed : “ It is fairly asked, goodman, and I will not spare to show thee my title.” Therewith he drew forth his sword, a great and heavy blade, and cast it rattling on the board before him, and said : “ There is my title, goodman ; wilt thou ask a

better?" The goodman groaned and said: "At least, lord, I pray thee take not all I have, but leave me some little whereby to live, and thereof I will pay somewhat year by year, if the seasons be good."

"My friend," quoth Hardcastle, "by the title that lieth yonder I have gotten thy wealth, and every jot of it might I keep if I would. But see how kind I am to thee and thine. For have I not told you that ye shall live in this house, and eat the sweet and drink the strong and lie warm a-nights, so long as ye do my will."

"Yea," said the goodman, "but we must needs toil as thralls." "Great fool," said Hardcastle, "what matters that to thee? It is like thou shalt work no harder than erst, or no harder than may be enough to keep me as thy guest. Nay, goodman, wilt thou turn me from thy door and deny me guesting? What sayest thou to that, Fiddlebow, my sharp dear?" said he, handling his sword. Now the goodman crept away, and Surly John says that he wept.

But Osberne came forward as smiling and debonaire as erst, and he said: "Fair sir, one thing I crave of thee to tell me, to wit, is there no other way out of this thralldom, for well thou wottest that no man would be a thrall might he help it?" "Well, my lad," quoth the warrior smiling, for now after his talk with the goodman he was in better humour, "when thou growest older thou wilt find that saw of thine belied manywise, and that many there be who are not loth to be thralls. But as to what way there may be out of this thralldom, I will tell thee the way, as I was about to do with the goodman; though whereas he is but little-hearted, and there is none else fight-

worthy in the house, save it were this lubber in front— Well thou, why art thou skellying, man, as if thou wouldst cast the eyes out of thine head on either side ? ” Quoth Stephen : “ I was grown so afraid of thee, fair sir, that I wotted not where to look, so I thought my eyes would do me least harm if they looked down along my nose. ” Quoth Hardcastle : “ I begin to see how it will go with thee, great lout, that in the first days of my mastership thine hide shall pay for thy folly. ” Stephen squinted none the less, but his whittle was yet in his belt.

Now Hardcastle went on speaking to Osberne and said : “ Well now, I will tell thee the way out of this thraldom, as thou wilt call it ; and the more to thee, bairn, because thou wilt become my man and wilt be bold and deft, I doubt not ; therefore thou shouldst learn early the fashions of great and bold men. Hearken ! ever when I offer to some man a lot that seemeth hard unto him, then I bid him, if it likes him not, to pitch me the hazelled field hard by his house, and we to go thereinto and see what point and edge may say to it ; and if he slay me or hurt me so much that I must be borne off the field within the four corners, then is he quit, and hath his land again, and hath gained mickle glory of my body. Moreover if he may not fight himself, yet will I meet any champion that he may choose to do battle with me. Now this is a good and noble custom of the bold, and hath been deemed so from time long ago. And indeed I deem pity of it that here today the goodman may not fight nor hath found any champion to fight for him. But three days frist will I give him to find such a champion. —Thou wretch,” said he to Stephen, “ why wilt thou still skelly at me ? ”

“Because the champion is found,” said Stephen in a snuffling voice.

Hardcastle snorted and his lip-beard bristled, but forth stood Osberne, and he still smiling; and he said: “Thou warrior, three things I offer thee to choose from, and the first is that thou depart hence, thou and thy man; because thou hast not dealt with us as a guest should, but hast smitten me and threatened all of us, and brazened out thy wrong-doing. This is the best way out of thy folly. What sayest thou to it?” But such fury was in the ruffler’s heart now, that he had no words for it, but rolled about in the high-seat snorting and blowing. Said Osberne: “I see thou wilt not take this way, and that is the worse for thee. Now the next is that we hazel a field and fight therein. Wilt thou have this?” The champion roared out: “Yea, that will I! but in such wise that thou take sword and shield and I a bunch of birch twigs; and if I catch thee not and unbreech thee and whip thee as a grammar master his scholar, then will I lay down sword and shield for ever.”

Said Osberne coldly: “Thou seest not that I am girt with a sword, and I tell thee it is a good one. Or wilt thou take Surly John’s knife this morning and do as I did with it last night? And I did it for a warning to thee, but belike thou wert drunk and noted it not.”

Hardcastle’s face fell somewhat, for now he did remember the feat of the knife. But Osberne spake again: “I ask thee, warrior, wilt thou enter the field that I shall hazel for thee?” Quoth the ruffler, but in a lower voice: “I cannot fight with a boy; whether I slay him or am slain I am shamed.”

Spake Osberne: “Then depart from the house with

as little shame as a ruffler and a churl may have. But if thou wilt neither of these things, then will it befall that I shall draw my blade and fall on thee to slay thee, and make the most of it that here stands by me my man Stephen, a true and fearless carle, with his whittle bare in his hand. And this I may well do, whereas, by thine own telling, thou art not in our house but in thine own."

Hardcastle lifted up his head, for he had hung it down a while, and said in a hoarse voice: "Hazel the field for me then, and I will go therein with thee and slay thee." "That may well be," said Osberne, "—yet it may not be." Then he bade Stephen to go hazel the field in the flat meadows toward the river: and therewith he bethought him of his friend on the further side of the water, and how it might well be that he should never see her again, but lie slain on the meadow of Wethermel; and he wondered if tidings of the battle would go across the water and come unto her. But amidst his musings the harsh voice of Hardcastle reached his ears: he turned round with a start and heard how the ruffler said to him: "Let me see the sword, lad, wherewith thou wilt fight me." Osberne took the sheathed blade from his girdle and handed it to Hardcastle without a word, and the warrior fell at once to handling the peace-strings, but Osberne cried out: "Nay, warrior, meddle not with the peace-strings, for who knoweth what scathe may come of the baring of the blade within doors?" "Well, well," said Hardcastle, "but the blade must out presently, and what harm if it be now?" Yet he took his hand from the weapon, and laid it on the board before him.

Osberne looked about him and saw that they two were alone in the hall now, for the others had gone

down to look on the hazelling. So he spake quietly and said: "Warrior, is it not so, that thou hast in thine heart some foreboding of what shall befall?" Hardcastle answered nought, and Osberne went on: "I see that so it is, and meseems it were better for thee if this battle were unfought. Lo now, shall we not make peace in such wise that thou abide here this day in all honour holden, and in honour depart tomorrow morn, led out with such good gifts as shall please thee? Thus shalt thou have no shame, and everything untoward betwixt us shall be forgotten." Hardcastle shook his head and said: "Nay, lad, nay, the tale would get about, and shame would presently be on the wing towards me. We must stand within the hazel-garth against each other." Then he spake again, and a somewhat grim smile was on his face: "Awhile ago thou didst threaten to slay me with the help of yonder squinting loon, but now thou standest unarmed before me, and I have thy sword under my hand. Hast thou no fear of what I may do to thee, since so it is that forebodings weigh on mine heart?"

"Nay, I am not afraid," said Osberne; "thou mayst be a bad man, yet not so bad as that."

"Sooth it is," said Hardcastle; "but I say again, thou art a valiant lad. Lo now, take thy sword again; but tell me, what armour of defence hast thou for this battle?"

"Nought save my shield," said Osberne; "there is a rusty steel hood stands yonder on the wall, but no byrny have we in the house."

Said Hardcastle: "Well, I may do so much as this for thee, I will leave all my defences here and go down to the hazels with nought but my sword in my fist,

and thou shalt have thy shield ; but I warn thee that Fiddlebow is a good blade.”

Said Osberne, and smiled : “ Well I wot that, if thou get in but one downright stroke on me, little shall my shield avail me against Fiddlebow. Yet I take thine offer and thank thee for it. But this forthinketh me, that if thou live out this day thou wilt still betake thee to the same insolency and greediness and wrong-doing as thou hast shown yesterday and this morning.”

Hardcastle laughed roughly and said : “ Well, lad, I deem thou art right ; wherefore slay me hardily if thou mayst, and rid the world of me. Yet hearken, of all my deeds I have no shame at all : though folk say some of them were ugly—let it be.”

Therewith came Stephen into the hall, and he did them to wit that the hazels were pitched, and now he squinted no more.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SLAYING OF HARDCASTLE

So they three went down together into the meadow, and there stood the others by the hazel-garth ; the goodman cowering and abject, Surly John pale and anxious, and the two women clinging together in sore sorrow, the grandam weeping sorely. But as they passed close by these last, Stephen touched the grandam and said to her : “ Sawest thou ever King David the little ? ” “ Nay,” she said sobbing. “ Look thou into the hazel-garth presently then,” said he, “ and thou shalt see him with eye.”

So now they two stood in the hazelled field ; it was

two hours before noon, the sky was overcast with a promise of the first snow of the winter, but as yet none had fallen, and the field was dry and hard. Now Hardcastle has Fiddlebow bare in his fist, but Osberne takes Boardcleaver from his girdle and unwinds the peace-strings ; then he stands still for a moment and looks toward his foeman, who cries out at him : “ Haste thee, lad, I were fain done with it.” Then Osberne draws forth the blade, and it made a gleam of white in the grey day, and as the folk say who stood thereby, as Boardcleaver came forth bare there came a great humming sound all about. Then Osberne gets his shield on his arm and cries out : “ Now thou warrior ! ” and straightway Hardcastle comes leaping toward him, and Osberne abode him as he came on with uplifted sword, leapt lightly to one side, and thrust forth Boardcleaver and touched his side, so that all could see the blade had drunk a little blood. Fiercely and fast turned Hardcastle about on the lad, but therewith was he within the ruffler’s stroke, and Boardcleaver’s point was steady before Osberne’s breast and met Hardcastle’s side and made a great wound with the point, and the warrior staggered back, and his sword-point was lowered. Then cried out Osberne : “ What ! thou wouldst unbreech me, wouldst thou ? but now art thou unbreeched.” For therewith Boardcleaver swept round backhanded and came back as swift as lightning, and the edge clave all the right flank and buttock of him, so that the blood ran freely ; and then as Hardcastle, still staggering, hove up his sword wildly, Osberne put the slant stroke aside with his shield and thrust forth Boardcleaver right at his breast, and the point went in, and the whole blade, as there were nought but dough before

it, and Hardcastle, nigh rent in two, fell aback off the sword.

Osberne stood still a while looking on him, but Stephen ran up and knelt beside him, and felt his wrist and laid his hand on the breast, and then turned and looked up at Osberne, who knelt down beside him also and wiped the blood off Boardcleaver with a lap of the dead man's coat. Then he stood up and thrust the blade back into the sheath, and wound the peace-strings about it all. Then came the word into his mouth, and he sang :

Came sword and shield
 To the hazelled field
 Where the fey man fell
 At Wethermel :
 The grey blade grew glad
 In the hands of a lad,
 And the tall man and stark
 Leapt into the dark.

For the cleaver of war-boards came forth from his door
 And guided the hand of the lacking in lore.

But now is the blade
 In the dark sheath laid,
 And the peace-strings lull
 His heart o'erfull.
 Up dale and down
 The hall-roofs brown
 Hang over the peace
 Of the year's increase.

No fear rendeth midnight, and dieth the day
 With no foe save the winter that weareth away.

Then he cried out : " Draw nigh, goodman and grandsire, and take again the house and lands of

Wethermel, as ye had them aforetime before yesterday was a day." So the goodman came to him and kissed him, and thanked him kindly and humbly, and the women came and embraced him and hung about him. As for Surly John, he had slunk away so soon as he saw the fall of his master, and now when they looked around for him, they saw him but as a fleck going swiftly down the Dale. Thereat they all laughed together, and the laughter eased their hearts, so that they felt free and happy.

"Now," said Stephen, "what shall we do with this carcass, that was so fierce and fell this morning?" Said Osberne: "We shall lay him in earth here in his raiment as he fell, since he died in manly wise, though belike he has lived as a beast. But his sword I will give to thee in reward for thy trusty following both now and at other times."

So Stephen fetched mattock and pick, and dug a grave for that champion amidwards of the hazel-garth, and there they laid him, and heaped up mould and stones over his grave; and to this day it is called Hardcastle's Howe there, or for short, and that the oftenest, Hardcastle.

So they went all of them up to the house, and were merry and joyful.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELFHILD HEARS OF THE SLAYING

BUT two days after this was the tryst-day for Osberne to see his over-water friend, and he went soberly enough, and came to the water-side and found her over against him; and she asked him of tidings.

"Tidings enough," said he, "for now have I done a deed beyond my years, a deed unmeet for a child ; to wit, I have slain a man."

"O," she said, "and didst thou sleep after the deed?" Said Osberne: "Yea, and dreamed never a deal. But I must tell thee that I was in my right." Said Elfhild: "What did he to thee that thou must slay him?" Osberne said: "He came swaggering into our house and would take all to him, and put all of us to the road or hold us in thralldom." She said: "But tell me, how didst thou slay him? Was he drunk or asleep?" "Nay," said he, "I was champion for my grandsire, and the robber had a sword in his fist, and I another, and we fought, and I overcame him." Said the maiden: "But was he mannikin or a dastard, or unskilled in weapons?" Spake Osberne, reddening: "He was a stark carle, a bold man, and was said to be of all prowess."

She said nothing a while, but stood pale and downcast. And he said: "What is this, playmate? I looked to have much praise from thee for my deed. Dost thou know that this man was as the pest to all the country-side, and that I have freed men of peace from a curse?" "Be not wrath with me, Osberne," she said, "indeed I am somewhat downcast ; for I see that now thou wilt be no playmate for me, but wilt be a man before thy time, and wilt be looking towards such things as men desire ; and that tall maidens come to womanhood will be for thee, not quaint rags of children such as I be."

"Now, Elfhild," said he, "why wilt thou run to meet trouble half way? Am I worsen to thee than I was last time?"

"Nay," she said, "and indeed I deem thee glorious,

and it is kind and kind of thee to come to me ever, and not to miss one of our trysts."

"Now thou art dear," said Osberne; "and wilt thou do something for my disport? wilt thou pipe thy sheep to thee?"

"Nay," said she, "I will not; I will not skip like an antic, and show thee my poor little spindle legs. If I were a woman grown I should scarce show so much as the ankle of my foot. Besides, thou laughest at my hopping and jumping amongst those foolish woolly beasts, and I would not have thee laugh at me."

"Elfhild my dear," said he, "thou art wrong. When I have laughed it was never in mockery of thee, but for pleasure of thy pretty ways and the daintiness of thy dancing, which is like to the linden leaves on a fresh summer morning."

"But how am I to know that?" she said. "Well, at any rate ask me not to dance today. But I will sit down and tell thee a very sweet tale of old times, which thou hast never erst heard. It is about the sea and ships, and of a sea-wife coming into the dwellings of men." Quoth Osberne, "I were fain to look on the sea and to sail it." "Yea," said Elfhild, "but thou wilt take me with thee, wilt thou not?" "O yea," said Osberne. And they both forgot the Sundering Flood, and how they should never meet, as they sat each side of the fearful water, and the tale and sweet speech sped to and fro betwixt them. So a fair ending had that day of tryst.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WINTER PASSES AND ELFHILD TELLS OF THE
DEATH OF HER KINSWOMAN

Now Osberne and Stephen both give rede to the goodman, and bid him live somewhat less niggardly, since not only had they good store of victual and clothes and the like, which had been hoarded a long time, but also the gifts of Waywearer had stood them in good stead, and furthermore, the goodman was much bettered by the spoil of Hardcastle. For he had left much wealth behind him, and chiefly in silver and gold ; and all that he had left, save his weapons, had Osberne given to his grandsire. So the goodman heeded their words and let himself be talked over, and while winter was yet young and before there was any snow to hinder, he rode with Osberne down the Dale, and looked into many of the steads, and amongst others, where dwelt the damsel who had been paired with Osberne on the day of the mid-winter Cloven Mote. And he thought her fair and sweet, and she received him joyfully and kissed him ; but he was scarce so ready for that as he was aforetime, for he deemed she kissed him as a child and not a man.

So by hook or by crook the goodman got him six hired folk ; three men, two of whom were young, and three women, all young and one comely, one ill-favoured, and the other betwixt and between. It must be said by the way, that if he had abided the spring for getting these new folk he would scarce have hired them, for the repute of Wethermel for scant housekeeping had gone wide about ; but when folk

heard that Master Nicholas was hiring folk from mid-winter onwards, they were willing enough to go, whereas they deemed he would be changing his mind and becoming open-handed. So Nicholas rides back with his catch (for he had brought nags to horse them), and henceforth is good house kept at Wethermel, as good as anywhere in the Dale.

Again fared Osberne to the mid-winter Cloven Mote, and again was he mated to the above-said damsel, who hight Gertrude; and forsooth this time he deemed that she kissed him and caressed him not so wholly as a mere boy, though of such things ye may well deem he knew little. For she seemed to find it hard when they kissed, as paired folk are bound to do, to let her lips leave his, and when their hands parted at the end of the Mote she gave a great sigh, and put her cheek toward him for a parting kiss, which forsooth he gave her somewhat unheedfully; for he was looking hard toward the other shore to see if he could make out the shape of Elfhild amongst the women there; as he had done whenever he gat a chance of it all day long, but had failed wholly therein.

Three days afterwards he kept tryst with Elfhild, and asked her if she had been at the Mote, and she told him No; that her aunts went every time but always left her behind. Then she said smiling: "And this time they have come back full of thy praises, for the tale of thee, and the slaying of the robber, has come over to our side; and one of them, the youngest, had thee shown to her by one of the folk, and she saith that thou art the fairest lad that ever was seen: and therein she is not far wrong."

He laughed and reddened, and told for tidings how he had fared at the Mote, and Elfhild belike was not

best pleased to hear of the fair damsel who was so fond of kissing ; but in all honesty she rejoiced when Osberne told how hard he had looked for her on the other side of the water. So they made the most of their short day, as indeed they had need to do, for through the winter, when the snow was on the earth and the grass grew not, the sheep were all shut up in the folds and the cotes, and there was no shepherding toward ; so that Elfhild was hard put to it for some pretence for getting away from the house, and their trysts had to be further between than they had been ; and not seldom, moreover, Elfhild failed at the trysting-place, and Osberne had to go sorrowfully away, though well he wotted it was by no fault of his playmate.

So wore the winter tidingless, and spring came again, and again the two met oftener ; and great feast they made the first day, when Elfhild came to the ness with her head and her loins wreathed with the winter wolfsbane. It was a warm and very clear day of February, and Elfhild of her own will piped to her sheep and danced amongst them ; and Osberne looked on her eagerly, and he deemed that she had grown bigger and sleeker and fairer ; and her feet and legs (for still she went barefoot) since they had not the summer tan on them, looked so dainty-white to him that sore he longed to stroke them and kiss them. And this, belike, was the beginning to him of the longing of a young man, which afterwards was so sore on him, to be with his friend and embrace her and caress her.

So they met often that springtide, and oftener as the weather waxed warmer. And nought worth telling befel to Osberne that while save these meetings. But at last, when May was yet young, Osberne kept tryst thrice and Elfhild came not, and the fourth time

she came and had tidings, to wit, that one of her kinswomen had died of sickness. Said she : “ And it was the one who was least kind to me, and made most occasion for chastising me. Well, she is gone ; and often she was kind to me, and before I saw thee I loved her somewhat. But now things will go better, because the other aunt, who was kinder than the dead one, hath taken also into the house that old woman whereof I told thee, who hath taught me lore and many ancient tales ; and though she be old and wrinkled, she is kind and loves me : and she is on our side, and I have told her about thee ; and she in turn told me strange things and unked, which I will not and dare not tell again to thee. Wherefore now let us be glad together.”

Said Osberne : “ Yea, we will try to be glad ; but see thou, I want more than this now, I want to come across to thee, and tell thee things which I cannot shout across this accursed Flood ; and I want to take thee by the hand and put my arms about thee and kiss thee. Dost thou not wish the like by me ? ”

“ O yea,” said the maiden reddening, “ most soothly do I. But hearken, Osberne ; the carline sayeth that all this thou shalt do to me, and that we shall meet body to body one day. Dost thou trow in this ? ”

“ Nay, how can I tell,” said he somewhat surlily, “ when thou hast told me so little of the tale.”

“ Well,” she said, “ but I may not tell more ; so now, I pray, let us be glad with what we have got of meeting oftener, and a life better and merrier for me. Bethink thee, my dear, that if I live easier and have not to toil so much, and catch fewer stripes, and have better meat and more, I shall grow sleeker and daintier, yea and bigger, so that I shall look older and more

womanlike sooner." And she wept a little therewith ; so he repented his surliness and set to comfort her, till she laughed and he also, and they were merrier together.

So now time after time was their converse sweet and happy, and true it was that Elfhild grew fairer and sleeker week by week ; and she was better clad now, and well shod, and wore her ouches and necklaces openly, though she said she had not shown all to the carline, "not all of thine I mean. But the Dwarf necklace, the glorious one, I have shown her, and she saith that it is such a wonder that it forebodeth my becoming a Queen ; and that will be well, as thou shalt be a great man." Thuswise they prattled.

CHAPTER XX

OSBERNE FARES TO EASTCHEAPING AND BRINGS GIFTS FOR ELFHILD

BUT when June was, Master Nicholas would ride to Eastcheaping, and he took Osberne with him ; and a great wonder it was to see so many houses built of stone and lime all standing together, and so fair, as he deemed them, though it was but a little cheaping. Howsoever, without the walls was an abbey of monks, which was both fair and great, and the church thereof as well fashioned as most ; and when the lad went thereinto he was all ravished with joy at the great pillars and arches and the vault above, and the pictures on the walls and in the windows, and the hangings and other braveries about the altars. And when he was at high mass, and the monks and the minstrels fell to singing together, he scarce knew whether he were in

heaven or on earth. Yet whether in one or the other, he longed to have his friend from over the river with him, that she might see and hear it all, and tell him what she thought of it. Wondrous also was the market wherein they did their chaffer, and the chapmen in their fine coats of strange fashion to him and their outland faces, and the carts and wains of the country folk and their big sleek horses. And when it was all done he found that he had more than a silver penny or two in his pouch ; for a deal of the wares sold were his own, to wit the peltries he had gotten by his shooting and his valour. For a great bear had he slain with spear and shield, he by himself, and two more with the help of Stephen the Eater, and wolves and foxes and ermines and beavers a great many. But when he had the money it burnt a hole in his pocket ; for he must needs go to the booths and buy for Elfhild, as far as his money went, such things as he deemed he could shoot across the flood to her, as fair windowed shoon, and broidered hosen and dainty smocks and silken kerchiefs, and a chaplet for her head. And when this was done, he was about with his grandsire in the street, and there came down from the Castle a company of riders, all in jack and sallet and long spears, and two knights in white armour all gleaming in the sun, and the banner of the good town with them. Then his heart rose so high at the sight, and he yearned so for deeds of fame, that he smote his hands together and called good luck on them, and some of them turned about and laughed to each other, and praised the goodly boy, and knew not that he had slain a stouter man than e'er a one of them.

Withal his eyes might be no long while off the gay-clad young women (for it was holy day, and they

dressed out in their best), and he stared so downrightly on them that his grandsire rebuked him aloud. And that heard some of the women, and they who were fair amongst them laughed and praised him, for they deemed him right welcome to look on all he might see of them, so fair a boy as he was : and one of them, a goodly woman of some thirty summers, came up to him and bade the old carle hold his peace and not scold at the boy : " For," said she, " the lad is so well-liking that he hath good right already to deal with any woman as he will ; and when he groweth older by a half score years, God-a-mercy, which of us shall be able to say him nay ! Would I were younger by that tale of years, that I might be able presently to follow him all over the world." And therewith she kissed him betwixt the eyes and went her ways. But as before, he was but half pleased to be so kissed, as a mere child. Shortly to say, there they made great feast for the joy of all these things, and rode back to the Dale in a day or two, and came safe and sound to Wethermel.

Now at the next meeting 'twixt the two children Osberne bore down all those fair things ; and he found Elfhild on the ness, and she looking shy and dear, for he had told her that he was going to the cheaping. And now was her hair no longer spread abroad but bound up close to her head, and she was clad in a seemly gown of homespun, with black hosen and skin shoes well laced.

Straightway after the first greetings was great ado about shooting those fair things across the water ; and when they were all across, Elfhild undid them, and wept for sheer joy of them and for love of her valiant friend, and at last she sat nigh the edge hugging

them all to her bosom, and said : “ Now, sweetheart, is the tale on thy side ; for thou must tell me all that thou hast seen and done.” So he fell to, nought loth, and told everything at large, and the little maiden’s eyes sparkled and her face glowed ; but when he had told last of all about the women and of her who had kissed him, she said : “ Ah, all that is just what my carline saith of thee, that all women shall love thee ; and that is most like, and what shall I do then, I who shall be so far away from thee ? ” Then he swore to her that whatever betid he would always love her, and she made as if she were gladdened again thereby ; but in her heart she could not but deem that he made somewhat light of it, and was nought so anxious as she was.

But ere they parted that day, she went aback a little, and did on her all those fair things which he had brought, such as she might get upon her body ; and a green gown of fine cloth was one of them, which he had made a shift to cast across bundled up, by dint of his new strength. So dight, she stood for him to look at, and he was well pleased, and praised her in such wise that it was clear he looked at her wisely and closely. So they parted. But when he was gone, she sat down and wept, she knew not why. And in a while she arose and did on her everyday raiment and went home.

CHAPTER XXI

WARRIORS FROM EASTCHEAPING RIDE INTO THE
DALE

So the summer wears with nought to tell of, and autumn and winter in like manner, and spring was come again, and it was hard on two years since those twain had first met, and Osberne was fifteen years old and Elfhild but a month and a half less, and still they met happily as aforetime. Wethermel throve in all wise this while, and there was deep peace on the Eastern Dale, and never had the edges of Boardcleaver looked on the light of day since the fall of Hardcastle.

But in early May of this year came riders into the Dale, friends, though they rode all-armed, to wit the men-at-arms of Eastcheaping, even such as Osberne had seen riding down from the Castle the last time of his going thither; and the errand they came on was this, that war and strife were at hand for the good town, for the Baron of Deepdale had sent the Porte his challenge for some matter of truage, wherein the town deemed it had a clear right, and seeing that it was nought feeble, it had a settled mind to fight it out. Wherefore it had sent a knight of its service and a company of men-at-arms to see what help its friends of the Dale would give it at the pinch: for it was well known that the dalesmen were stalwarth carles if need were, both a-foot and on horseback, though they were no stirrers up of strife.

With this errand on hand came the men into the Dale, and the very first stead they came to was Wethermel, for it lay first on their road. And now was

Wethermel a well-manned stead, for besides Stephen the Eater, there were twelve carles defensible dwelling there, whereof five were sons of men of estate.

So when the said men-at-arms rode into the garth of a bright May evening, and they all glittering like so many heaps of sunlit ice, all folk came out a-doors, and Osberne stood before them all, clad in scarlet raiment, for Nicholas the goodman hung back somewhat, as was his wont when he deemed he saw peril at hand. Then Osberne hailed the newcomers, and asked no questions of them, and made no words save to welcome them and bid them in ; and they got off their horses and entered the house, one score and five all told. And there they unarmed them, and all service was done them, and then meat and drink were set on the board and all folk fared to supper, and it was soon seen that both sides were friendly and sweet together. And Osberne set the Knight who was their captain at his right hand, and they talked merrily together. But when supper was done the Knight spake unto Osberne and Nicholas and said : “Sirs, is it free for me to tell out our errand into the Dale ?” Osberne answered : “We should not have asked it, fair sir, if ye had not offered to tell it, but would rather have prayed you to drink a cup or two ; but so it is that we be eager to hear your tale, whereas we see that ye are of our friends of Eastcheaping.” Then the Knight began, and told them of their quarrel from point to point, and the right they deemed they had therein. And from time to time Osberne put in a question when he would have the matter made clearer to him, and the Knight deemed his questions handy and wise. And at last he said : “Now so it is, neighbours, that we ask help of you ; and the help we need

is not so much of money or beasts or weapons as of the bodies and souls of stark and stout-hearted men. What say ye, who be here, have ye will to ward your cheaping and the place where we have done good to each other, or will ye let all go down the wind as for you ? ”

“ Fair sir,” said Osberne, “ we will first ask you one question : Ye bid us to ride to battle with you in your quarrel ; but do ye bid and command us this service as of right, or do ye crave our help as neighbours, and because there is love and dealings betwixt us ? And this I ask because we dalesmen deem that we be free men, owning no service to any lord, or earl, or king.”

Said the Knight : “ We claim no service of you of right or by custom, but crave your help as bold and free neighbours who for love’s sake may be fain of helping friends in need.”

Spake Osberne : “ Then there is no more to be said but this, that there is one who will ride with you, and that is my own self. And though I be but a lad I have a stroke of work in me, as some hereby can witness ; and if thou wilt, I will ride down the Dale with you and give you my furtherance with the goodmen there. But as for these good fellows—Which of you will ride with this Knight against the good town’s foemen and ours ? ” They all cried aye to this and rose up and shouted. But Osberne said : “ Well, lads, but some one must be left behind to look to the goodman and the women, and husband field and fold. I will take with me but six and Stephen the Eater, my man.” And he named them one after the other.

Who were joyous now save the Knight and his men-at-arms, and they all drank a cup to the young master ;

but sooth to say, some of them wondered how so young a lad would bear him in the fight. But others said, Let-a-be, no man so well beloved as this shall be a dastard.

So merry they were in the hall and drank a bout, but not for long, whereas the captain would not have his men so drunk that they might not ride fast and far on the morrow. So the voidee cup was drunk, and Osberne led the Knight to his bed and gave him good-night. But ere he was asleep came Stephen to his bedside and asked was he fain of a tale ; and the Knight yeasaid it ; so Stephen told much about the Dale and its folk, and about the Dwarfs and the Landwights. And at last he fell to talk about his master, the young one, and told much of him and his valiancy and kindness and prowess ; and he told at length all the tale how Hardcastle had sped at his hands. And the captain marvelled and said : “ I am in luck to see this lad and be his fellow then ; for such marvels come not to hand more than once or twice in a ten score years, and this is one of them.”

·CHAPTER XXII

OSBERNE TAKES LEAVE OF ELFHILD

So they rose on the morrow and dight them in their armour ; and Osberne did on him Hardcastle's long byrny and gilded basnet, and girded Boardcleaver to him, and took his spear in hand and hung his shield at his back. But his bow and wonder-shafts he gave to Stephen to bear with him ; and Stephen and the other men were fairly well bedight ; and the captain said that if there was any lack of weapons or armour

to any of them it mattered but little, as they had good store of gear at the cheaping.

So they ate a morsel and drank one cup and then rode their ways down the Dale. And the longest tale that need be told of them is that, by the furtherance of Osberne, they sped their errand well at most of the steads of the mid and lower Dales. And they made stay for the night at a stead hight Woodneb, which was some little way up the river from the place where the East and West Dales held the Cloven Mote, and by consequence not over far from the trysting-place of those twain.

At the said house that even they were of one mind to gather a mote there the next morning, and they sent folk that same night to bear the war-arrow to the steads above and below, and all seemed like to go well; and ever Osberne spake his mind without fear or favour to the boldest and wisest that were there. But as he was laying himself down to sleep a pang shot into his heart, for he called to mind that the morrow was the very day of tryst at the Bight of the Cloven Knoll, and longer it was ere he got to sleep that night than was his wont. But when day came he was awake and few were stirring. So he arose and clad him in his war-gear, and went out of the house and out of the garth when it was not yet sunrise, and came down to the river and went up it till he and the sunbeams came together to his place over against the ness, and there he abided. But he had been there a scant half hour ere he saw Elfhild coming up the slope, and she clad in all that fair weed he had given her, wherein this time of spring and early summer she mostly came to the trysting-place, and about her shoulders was a garland of white May blossom. And when she saw him in

his shifting grey hawberk and gleaming helm, and Boardcleaver girt to his side and the spear in his hand, she stretched out her hands to him and cried out : " O if thou mightest but be here and thine arms about me ! for now I see that some evil hath befallen, and that thou art arrayed to go away from me out of the Dale. And O thy war-coat and thine helm ! thou art going into peril of death, and thou so young ! But I had an inkling hereof, for there were two carles in our house last night, and they said that there were weaponed men riding amidst the Eastdalers. Tell me, what is it ? Will ye fight in the Dale or go far from it ? and then how long dost thou look to be away ? "

He spake, and his face was writen with the coming tears, so sore his heart was stung by her sorrow : " It is indeed true that I am come to bid thee farewell for a while, and this is the manner of it. " And therewith he told her all as it was, and said withal : " Now I can do nought save to bid thee gather thy valiance to thee and not to wound my heart with the wildness of thy grief. And look thou, my dear ; e'en now thou wert saying thy yearning that mine arms were round about thy body : now are we no longer altogether children, and I will tell thee that it is many a day since I have longed for this ; and now I know that thou longest that our bodies might meet. Belike thou wilt deem me hard and self-seeking if I tell thee that there is more joy in me for the gain of that knowledge than there is sorrow in my heart for thy pain. "

" Nay, nay, " she said, " but for that I deem thee the dearer and the dearer. "

" See then, sweetheart, " said he, " how might it ever come about that we might meet bodily if I abode

ever at Wethermel and the Dale in peace and quietness, while thou dwelt still with thy carlines on the other side of this fierce stream? Must I not take chancehap and war by the hand and follow where they lead, that I may learn the wideness of the world, and compass earth and sea till I have gone about the Sundering Flood and found thy little 'body somewhere in the said wide world? And maybe this is the beginning thereof."

Now was the maiden a little comforted, and she said, smiling as well as she might: "And belike thou art for the cheaping again? Dost thou remember what a joy it was to thee to bring me those things and shoot and cast them over the water unto me? Now this time when thou comest back to the Dale I will ask thee to bring me one thing more, and then I shall be satisfied."

"Yea, sweetheart, and what shall that be?" And sooth to say it went against the grain with him that at the very moment of their parting she should crave something, like a very child, for a fairing. But she said: "O my dear, and what should it be but thou thyself?" And therewith she could refrain her passion no longer, but brake out a-weeping sorely again, so that her eyes could no longer behold him. But she heard many caressing words come across the water, and many farewells and words of grief, and yet she could not master her tears so that she could see him clearly, neither could she speak one word in answer. But at last she looked up and saw that he was gone from before her, and dimly she saw him yet a little way gone down the water, and he turned toward her and raised his hand and waved it to her. And nought else she saw of him for that time save the gleam

of his scarlet surcoat and a flash of his helm in the May sunlight.

But for Osberne, sick at heart at first he was, and he strode hurrying along if that might ease him a little, and after a while he took some deal of courage, but still hastened on leaving the water-side ; and then in a while himseemed to hear the voice of a great horn afar off, and he called to mind that the Mote had been summoned ; and his mind turned toward what was to do.

CHAPTER XXIII

OSBERNE IS CHOSEN CAPTAIN OF THE DALES MEN

So when he was come anigh the stead he saw the gathered folk and the glittering of weapons about a knoll a bowshot without the garth, and made the best of his way toward the Mote. And as he was drawing near, there ran toward him divers men from the skirts of the throng, and cried out to him to hasten, "For now," cried one of them, "the Mote is dealing with thee." So he ran on with them ; and when he entered the throng, which for those parts was no small one, there went up a great shout, and they shoved him along up to the foot of the knoll, on the top whereof stood three of the best men of estate, and the Lawman of the Dale, and the captain of the men of East-cheaping. These called him to come amongst them, and then the Lawman fell to speaking : "Osberne Wulfgrimsson," said he, "thou art late at the Mote, and it is well-nigh done, but this is the heart of the matter, that we have ten score and six of good men

pledged them to ride with these friends of Eastcheaping; but they have craved to have a captain to them chosen from us Dalesmen. But whereas there hath been but little war or strife in the Dale since the riding of the White Champion, which is a thirty years ago, we be for the most part little skilled in battle; and we all wot that thou hast a man's heart in thy lad's body, and that thou hast slain a mighty man of war, a man deft in all prowess. Wherefore some of the folk have spoken of thee to be the captain of our company; and I tell thee that I shall presently call for the word of the whole Mote, and if they yeasay it, then must thou needs go as captain of these, will thou nill thou."

Osberne was as red as fire in the face by then the Lawman was done, and he said: "Master, I pray thee consider my youth, and how I have had no schooling herein, and know nought of ordering men or arraying a battle. All this is nought like defending life and livelihood against a robber when there was none to serve at a pinch, and using one's mother-wit in dealing with it." The captain of the Eastcheapers smiled upon him kindly and said: "My son, he who can use his mother-wit to any purpose when the edges be aloft hath learned the more part of battle-craft. Withal it is but a few hours ago that I saw thee handling the men of thine household like to a ripe man. Fear not, my son, but that thou shalt do well enough; and moreover I promise that I will learn thee the craft all I may. And know that if thou deny this, then shalt thou take the heart out of these good fellows, who be eager enough to help the good town and be no mannikins, I warrant them. Naysay it not, my lad, naysay it not."

Now was Osberne's heart thumping against his ribs, what for sudden wonder, what for the hope of renown that flashed upon him as a sudden flame of strange light. But withal he thought in himself, and that all suddenly also : If the Sundering Flood is to be encompassed here is indeed the beginning of it, if this good Knight shall be my friend and shall learn me the craft of war, and thereby I become a man of might, to be desired and waged by them who have not either the craft or the courage to fight for themselves face to face with their foemen.

Wherefore now he turned to the Lawman and said : " Master, it is enough ; if the Mote of the neighbours will have me captain I may not naysay it : and may my luck be enough to overcome my childish years : and if not, may I lie on the field and not come back again to hear the mothers and maids curse me for having cast away the lives of their sons and their dears."

Then spake the Lawman, after he had smiled on Osberne and laid his hand on the lad's shoulder : " Men of the East Dale, ye be met together to see if ye can in any wise help our friends and neighbours of Eastcheaping, and ye have told off certain men to go in arms for their avail, and will have a captain over them. Now it hath been said to me that he who seems likeliest for the said captain is the young man Osberne Wulfgrimsson of Wethermel, and if this be so, let me hear your voices saying Yea. But even then there will be time for any man of you to name another, if it seem good to him, and that name will be also put to the Mote, and a dozen others if such there be. Now first, what say ye to Osberne Wulfgrimsson ? "

Straightway arose a great cheer and the clashing of weapons, and well-nigh every man as it seemed cried out Yea. But when the noise and cry was abated, the Lawman bade any man who would put forth another name. No man spake for a little, till at last Surly John pushes forth to the front and says: "I name Erling Thomasson, a good man and true!" Brake forth then great laughter and whooping, for the said Erling was a manifest niggard, a dastard who sweated in his bed when the mouse squeaked in the wall a night-time. But one man sang out: "Yea, Lawman, and I name Surly John." Thereat was there fresh laughter, and men shoved John to and fro till they had hustled him out to the skirts of the throng, and there bid him go a wolf-hunting.

But now the Lawman takes Osberne by the hand and leads him to the edge of the knoll, and stands there and says: "Men of the Dale, ye would go to the war; ye would take a captain to you; ye would have Osberne Wulfgrimsson for your captain. All this ye have done uncompelled, of your own will; therefore take not the rue if it turn not out so well as ye looked for. But now I bid all them that be going this journey to lift up their right hands and swear to be leal and true to your captain, Osberne Wulfgrimsson, in all things, for life or for death."

Even so they did with a hearty good will: thereupon Osberne spake and said, after he had had a word with [the Knight] Sir Medard, apart: "All ye my men, I have but this to say to you: I hold you trusty and valiant, and men unlike to fight soft. But this I know of you, as of all other of us Dalesmen, that ye are most wont to go each after his own will, and it is well-nigh enough to put a man off from doing a thing if

another man say to him, Do it. Now this manner ye must change, since ye are become men-at-arms, and if I bid you go to the right or the left, ye need think of nought but which is your right hand and which the left; though forsooth I wot well that some of you be so perverse that even that debate may lead you into trouble and contention. Now look to it that ye may not all be captains, and they that try it, so long as I be over you, are like to wend into wild weather. Now stouthearts, and my friends, it is now a little past high noon; and we shall abide here no longer than tomorrow morn, and at daybreak we shall be on our way to Eastcheaping, wherefore that time have ye got to see to your weapons and array, and to say farewell, such of you as be not too far off, to your kindred and wives and sweethearts. And now let all we do our best when we come among the edges, so that hereafter one man may say to another: Thou art as valiant as the Dalesmen when they fought in the war of Eastcheaping."

Then all men gave a great shout, and were well-nigh weeping-ripe for high heart and for love of him, though a minute before their faces were all agrin, so wise and valiant and kind they deemed his words and the manner of his speaking.

Therewith the Mote brake up, and the men were busy arraying them for departure: and as for Osberne, he had his hands full of work, in giving and taking commandments, and in learning from Sir Medard the beginnings of the lore of battle; so that what hopes he had of making his way to the trysting-place once more were speedily swept aside. And the next morning betimes they set out together, the Dalesmen and the Eastcheapers, in all good fellowship, and in two

days' time came to Eastcheaping; and there were the Dalesmen welcomed dearly, and they were lodged full well by the crafts-masters of the good town. But Sir Medard took Osberne with him up into the Castle and gusted him there, that he might the closer teach him his new craft, and an apt scholar he found. Also from the morrow after their coming, the captain, by bidding of the Porte, furnished and arrayed the Dalesmen with weapons, as long spears and good swords and bows and arrows, and jacks and sallets and shields, and they went out into the mead under the Castle to be better assured thereby, and fell to learning how best to handle their weapons. And both their captains and they themselves deemed it best that they should fight a-foot; for though they were good horsemen after their fashion, they would have to learn all in the craft of fighting a-horseback.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SKIRMISH WITH THE BARON OF DEEPDALE IN THE MARSHES

Now I have nought to do to write a chronicle of the good town of Eastcheaping, or a history of this war of them of the town with the Baron of Deepdale, or else a long tale I might make of it. So here follows all that shall be told of the said war.

In somewhat less than a month from their coming to Eastcheaping they had sure news that the Baron was on the way to the town with a great company of knights and men-at-arms; and thereafter it was known that he was riding with a light heart and little heed.

Wherefore Sir Medard turned the matter over in his mind, and, whereas if any one knew well the roads and the fields about Eastcheaping, he, Sir Medard, knew them better, he deemed he might give this great lord a brush by the way. So he rode out a-gates with but a small company of men-at-arms, five score to wit, all in white armour, and rides with them along the causeway. But early in the night, ere he set out, he had bidden a twelve score footmen make their way quietly in knots of five and ten and thereabout to a certain place fifteen miles as the highway led from Eastcheaping, where the said causeway, craftily made, went high raised over a marish place much beset with willow and alder, an evil place for the going of heavily-laded horses. But of these same footmen, some half had bows, and the rest spears and swords; all the Dalesmen went with these, and Osberne was the captain of the whole company, but with him was an old grey-beard, a sergeant tried in many wars, and a guileful man therein, and to him and Osberne Sir Medard showed what should be done.

So now the Baron and his came riding along the causeway, ten hundreds of men in all, lightly and in merry fashion, for they had said that they would go knock at the door of Eastcheaping and see what the carles were about there; and it was hard on noon. And first came riding an hundred or so of tall men well armed in white armour, their basnets new tinned; and they came to a certain place where on either side was abundance of thick alder bush and the ground soft between, and there was the causeway wider by a spear-length than its wont for some two score yards. Well, this hundred passed by on their way, but when they were clean out of sight, and the next company

not yet come, up rise a half dozen of men from out the alders on either side, and come on to the causeway: they are clad in homespun coats and hoods, though if any had looked closely he had seen hawberks and steel hoods under the cloth. These men lay some things down on the causeway in the very midst between the narrows, and then get them back into the marsh again.

No sooner are they gone but there comes the sound of weaponed men going, and presently there is the head of a much bigger company coming on to the wide space betwixt the narrows, three hundreds of men at least. They were armed and mounted as well as might be, but kept not very good order. When the first of them came to the place where the marsh-lurkers had been, they found lying athwart the causeway, one on each side, two dead porkers, two dead dogs, two hares, and in the very midst a fox, these also dead. The first men wonder at this, and get off their horses and handle the carcasses; then they call others to look at them; and some deem this the work of dwarfs or fairies or such like; and others say this is a sign or token of the up-country folk to rise upon them, and that they had best send men a-foot to search the marsh; and others that they should send tidings to the rearward folk. And some say one thing, some another, and all the while their fellows are thronging into the wide place till they are all crowded together, and not a third part of them know what has befallen, and deem that something has gone amiss; and the rearward fall to drawing their swords and crying out, To it, to it! Slay, slay! Deepdale, Deepdale! till scarce a man knew his right hand from his left.

But amidst all this turmoil a great voice (and it

was Stephen the Eater) cried out from the marsh at the right hand : " Go back, ye swine, to Deepdale." Then another sang out from the north : " If ye can, ye dead dogs." Then Stephen again : " This time ye must run like hares." " Learn lore of the fox next time, if ye can," cried the northern voice. And even therewith was the twanging of bowstrings from either side, and the whistle of shafts and spears, for the foemen were near enough, and men and horses fell huddling on the causeway, and the shafts rained on without abatement, and the Deepdale riders were in sorry case indeed ; and many of them were good knights well tried in the wars.

Then some gat off their horses and entered the marsh, and found no better hap there, for they were speedily slain by axe and sword of the Eastcheapers ; or they squattered in the mire and yielded them to whomsoever was before them, of whom Stephen gat a good knight full-armed. But Osberne was elsewhere. For some of the Baron's men spared not to turn their backs and ride all they might rearward ; but they went but a little way into the narrows ere they saw steel before them, and there across the causeway stood the company of the Dalesmen, even such as were not with the bowmen. Desperately they drave at them ; but it was all for nought, for the first four fell, they and their horses, before the long spears of the Dalesmen, and the others were cumbered with the wounded and the slain, so that they might not come on a-horseback. Howbeit, some dismounted and fell on sword in hand. Then forth from the ranks of the Dalesmen came a slim warrior in a long hawberk and bright basnet and a shield on his arm, and he put his hand to his left side and drew, and it was as if a beam

of fell blue flame flashed in the sun ; and he cried out : “ For the Dale ! For the Dale ! Hasten, fellows, and follow on, for Boardcleaver crieth for a life.” And therewith he entered among the Deepdale folk and smote right and left, and with each stroke hewed a man, and they fell back before him ; and then the Dalesmen were by his side instead of the foes, and still he went forward and men fell before him, and still came on the spears of the Dalesmen ; and now all they of Deepdale, whether a-foot or on horse-back, turn and flee away toward the place of the first slaughter.

Then Osberne cried to his men : “ Off the causeway now, all ye Dalesmen ; these ye shall not chase, they shall fall in with chasing enough anon ; and now must the causeway be clear of all but foemen if I know aught of Sir Medard’s mind. Ye have done well.” Therewith he gat him quietly from off the causeway, and all they followed ; they went but a little way, and then about on the tussocks around the alder bushes, and turned toward the causeway and awaited new tidings.

Speedily they befel ; for anon they heard a confused noise of crying and shouting and thundering of horse-hoofs, and clattering of weapons and war-gear, and then burst out from a corner of the causeway all the throng of fleers, spurring all they might, weaponless, many of them jostling and shoving each other, so that every now and then man and horse fell over into the marsh and wallowed there, till the Dalesmen came up and gave them choice of death or rendering. And came great cries of Eastcheaping ! For the Porte ! and A Medard, a Medard ! and the riders of Eastcheaping came thrusting amongst the fleers, and with

the first of the chasers was Medard himself bareheaded, so that all might know him, and after him his banner of a Tower and an Eagle sitting therein; and then came the banner of the good town, to wit, three Wool-packs on a red ground; and then the rest of the riders. And all that went by in a minute or two, and thereafter came the bowmen, all bemired with the marish waters, but talking high and singing for joy. Said Osberne: "Come we now, fellows, and join ourselves to these, for they will not run away like to the horses. Now belike has Sir Medard done the business, so we may follow him fair and softly." "He may yet have somewhat to do," quoth a man who was of that country; "for in a while this marish ends and the causeway comes out on to fair and soft meadows, and there we may look yet again to come on the Baron and his." "Sooth is that," quoth the sergeant from amongst the bowmen on the causeway; "yet is not the good Knight so hare-brained as not to abide ere he falls on, save he see no defence in what is left of the Baron's array. Ye shall see; but come thou up, Master Osberne, with thy Dalesmen, and let us get on to the said sunny meads out of this frog-city."

So Osberne and his Dalesmen scrambled up, and they all went on together at a pretty pace; and Osberne had not yet sheathed Boardcleaver, but bore him on his shoulder all bloody as he was.

So in an half hour they saw the hard meads before them, and then they set up a shout and ran all together, for they heard the noise of battle, and saw some confused running and riding, and knew not what it might mean. So on they ran till they had come up on to the crown of a long but low ridge whence they might see the whole plain, and straightway they set up the

whoop of victory. Forsooth what they beheld was the two banners of Sir Medard and the Porte following on the last of the fleers, and beyond them the whole host of the Baron flowing away as men discomfited ; so they rested to catch their breath on the top of the ridge, and of all of them that went out from East-cheaping the night before there was not one man lacking. Then they set off again toward the battle, their weapons on their shoulders and their horns blowing ; and they went speedily, and presently they saw that Sir Medard and his had slacked in the chase and were standing together about the banners with their faces to the foe. Wherefore they also went slower, and they met together with many glad cries ; and then Osberne came to Sir Medard and hailed him joyfully, and therewith thrust Boardcleaver back into the sheath and said : “ Meseemeth, Captain, that the battle is done. But [how] came their whole host to flee away ? ” Said Sir Medard : “ We drave the rout along the causeway, and they, when they came on to the hard meadow, might not stay them ; and the rest, who saw them coming on the spur and our banners in the chase, knew not how many or how few were following on them, and they turned also, deeming they were safest at home. And so now we will gather the spoil together and wend fair and softly back to East-cheaping.”

Even so they did, and great spoil they gathered, and all the footmen gat them horses and rode with the others ; so that they all came back safe to the good town before sunset. Thus ended the first riding of the Baron of Deepdale.

CHAPTER XXV

STEPHEN TELLS OF AN ADVENTURE IN THE CAMP
OF THE FOEMEN

THEREAFTER the Baron gathered his men again, and rode abroad divers times in the summer and autumn, and was now gotten warier, so that he gat no great overthrow. Yet was he often met by them of Eastcheaping, and not seldom had the worse. Osberne and his were in the field as oft as any, and gave and took, but ever showed them valiant. Osberne was hurt twice, but not sorely, and ever he waxed in manhood, and was well accounted of by all men; and the Dalesmen began to be well known to them of Deepdale and were a terror to them.

Thus wore summer and autumn, and Osberne saw no face of the hope of getting home to the Dale before spring. The winter came early, and was with much frost and snow, and they of Eastcheaping kept them within their walls perforce, but they held the Yule-feast merrily and with good heart.

When winter was gone and the snow and the floods, and spring was come again, there began again skirmishing and riding; and now one, now the other prevailed; and Osberne fell to learning all the feats of chivalry under Sir Medard. And in one fray he paid his master back for the learning, and somewhat more; for the Knight thrust too far forth amongst the foemen, and was unhorsed and set on by many; and had not Osberne been [nigh], who bestrode him with Boardcleaver in his fist, and thrust and hewed all around till some of theirs came up to help, the good town had

lost its captain. So he rehorsed Sir Medard, and somewhat hardly they came forth of the throng, and were not ill beaten that day.

But when May was, the Baron of Deepdale had waxed so mighty that he gathered a great host together, and came therewith against Eastcheaping, so that they had nought to do save draw within their walls : and the Baron sent a herald, and bade thereby yield them, on such terms, over and above paying their truage according to his will, that they should batter down their walls, and take his men into their castle and have his burgreve over them, and moreover that they give over ten of their best to his mercy. This challenge they naysaid in few words, for the town was well victualled and manned. Wherefore on the morrow early the Baron assailed the walls with many men, but gat nothing thereby save loss of good men ; and the assault over, Medard and his opened the gates and went forth on the foemen while they were yet in disarray, and won much and lost little.

Thereafter the Baron assailed the walls no more, but cast a dyke about the town and sat down before it ; and he had abundance of victual coming in to him from his country-side, so that his men lacked nothing. But whereas his dyke and the towers of earth and timber which he let build thereon were scarce manned so well as they should have been, because there was so much of them, the Eastcheapers did not leave them wholly in quiet, but fell on oft and hard, and slew the Baron many men and did him much scathe. And men in the town were in good heart, and said one to the other, that if things went no worse than this they might hold out merrily till winter should break up the leaguer. But in the last of these skirmishes Osberne

was hurt sorely, and though he was brought off by his fellows, and lost not Boardcleaver, as well-nigh betid, he must needs keep his bed somewhat more than a month ere he was well healed.

But on a day in September, when he was much amended and was growing strong again, came to him Stephen, whom he had not seen for some days, and seeing that there was no man in the chamber save they two, spake to him and said: Captain, I would have a word with thee if I might.

Said Osberne: "Speech is free to thee, Stephen." And the Eater said: "I have been out a-gates of late, for I deemed that if I might find adventures it would be for thy health." Said Osberne, laughing: "Yet maybe not for thine, Stephen. I were loth to come to Wethermel without thee." Said Stephen: "At this rate it may be long ere we come to Wethermel." "I would we might hasten the home-coming," said Osberne, knitting his brows, "but I wot not how that may be since the Baron is yet so strong." "Ah, but I have a deeming how it may be done," said Stephen: "but there is peril in it." Osberne stood up and said: "What hast thou been about, runagate?"

"Master," said he, "I will tell thee. Five nights ago I did on raiment of the fashion of them beyond Deepdale, and I had with me a fiddle, and was in manner of a minstrel; and thou wottest that I am not so evil a gut-scraper, and that I have many tales and old rhymes to hand, though I am no scald as thou art. Well, I got out a-gates a night-tide by the postern on the nook of the south-east tower, the warden whereof is a friend of mine own, and bade him expect me by midnight of the third day; and then by night

and cloud I contrived it to skirt the dyke and get me about till I came north-west of our north gate, and then somehow I got up over the dyke, which is low there and was not guarded as then, and in a nook I lay still till morning came. And there I let myself be found by one of the warders, and when he kicked me and challenged me, I told him what I would as to myself, and he trowed it, and he brought me to his fellows, who, a five of them, were cooking their breakfast, and they gave me victual and bade me play and sing for their disport, and I did so, and pleased them. Thereafter one of them took me along with him toward the west side of the dyke, and I played and sang; and so, to make a long story short, I worked round the dyke that day till I was come to the south side of the leaguer, and there I lay that night in good entertainment; but on the morrow I went on my way, and before evening I had come back again to the north-west, just where I had started from. There I fell in with the man-at-arms who had kicked me up the morning before, and he fell to speech with me, and showed me many things, and amongst others the great bastide wherein, said he, the Baron of Deepdale was lodged, and that it was little guarded, which mattered nothing by day, but by night he deemed it something rash of the Baron to suffer so few men of his anigh him.

“ Now while we spake together thus there was a stir about us, and we and others rose up from the grass where we were lying, and lo it was the Baron who was come amongst us, so we all did him reverence. He was a dark man, rather little than big, but wiry and hard-bitten; keen and eager of face, yet was there something lordly about his bearing. As luck would

have it he came straight to where we stood together, and stayed to look upon me as something unwonted to him, for I was wholly unarmed, save for a little knife in my girdle ; and I was clad in a black gown and a cotehardy of green sprigged with tinsel, and had my fiddle and bow at my back. We louted low before him, and he spake to my friend : ' Is this big fellow a minstrel ? ' ' Yea, lord,' said the other. Said the Baron : ' Looking at his inches, 't is a pity of him that he hath not jack and sallet and a spear over his shoulder. How sayest thou, carle ; what if I were to set thee in the forefront of the press amongst the very knight-hood ? ' ' Noble lord,' quoth I, ' I fear me if I came within push of spear thou wouldst presently see me running, so long are my legs. I am a big man, so please you, great lord, but I have the heart of a hare in me.' He looked upon me somewhat grimly, then he said : ' Meseems thou hast a fox's tongue in thee, carle, and I promise thee I have half a mind to it to hand thee over to the provost-marshal's folk, to see what they could make of whipping thee. Thou man-at-arms, hast thou heard him lay his bow over the strings ? ' ' Yea, lord,' said the man ; ' he playeth not ill for an uplander.' ' Let him try it now before us, and do it well withal if he would save the skin of his back.' Speedily I had my fiddle in my hand, and fell to, and if I played not my best, I played at least something better than my worst. And when I had done, the Baron said : ' Friend, how many such tunes canst thou play ? and canst thou sing aught ? ' ' It would not be so easy to tell up the tunes I can play, lord,' said I ; ' and sing I can withal, after a fashion.' Said the Baron to the man-at-arms : ' Bring thou this man to my lodging tonight some two hours before midnight,

and he shall play and sing to us, and if we be not sleep-eager he shall tell us some old tale also ; and I will reward him. And thou, I shall not make thee a man-at-arms this time, though trust me, I misdoubt thy hare-heart. There is no such look in thine eyes.' And he turned away and left us. So we wore the night merrily enough till the time appointed, what with minstrelsy and some deal of good wine.

"To the Baron's lodging I went, which was not right great, but hung goodly with arras of Troy. And I had the luck to please the lord ; for I both played and sang somewhat near my best. And he bade give me a handful of silver pennies, though I must needs share them with my soldier friend, unto whom the lord forgat to give aught, and bade me come the next night at the same time ; which I did, after I had spent the day in looking into everything about that side of the leaguer. But when I came forth with my friend from the lord's lodging that second night (and I the richer therefor), I did him to wit that the next morning early I should take my soles out of the leaguer and make for my own country, whatever might happen, so that no so many questions might be asked if I were missed on the morrow, as belike I was. Well, the end of this long story is, that a little before midnight I crept away and over the dyke and came to the postern and my friend, who let me into the town, and here I am safe and sound. Now, Captain, canst thou tell me why I took so much trouble in my disport, with no little peril withal ? "

Now for some time Osberne had been walking to and fro as he hearkened to the tale, and now he turned about sharply to Stephen and said : " Yea, I know ; thou wilt mean it in a day or two that we should go,

we two, by night and cloud to the Great Bastide and carry off the Baron of Deepdale, that we may give him guesting in the good town."

Stephen smote his palms together and said: "Wise art thou, child of Wethermel; but not so wise as I be. We shall go, we two, but not alone, but have with us four stout fellows, and of wisdom enough, not Dalesmen, for too simple are they and lack guile. To say sooth I have chosen them already, and told them how we shall fare, and they are all agog for it."

"Well," said Osberne, "and when shall it be? Of a sooth thou lettest no grass grow under thy feet. But hast thou told any one else?" Said Stephen: "Tomorrow night is the time appointed, and I have bidden my friend the warder of the postern to hold ready a score of men well-armed against the hour we are to be looked for to knock at the door with our guest, if so be that we should need them, but I have not told him what we are about. Well now, what sayest thou? Have I done anything to amend thine health?" "Thou hast made me whole and well, friend," said Osberne; "and now I think we shall soon look upon Wethermel, and I shall never be sick or sorry again."

The Eater smiled, and they fell to talking of other matters as folk came into the chamber to them; and all that came in wondered to see the captain looking so much mended in health.

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY BRING THE BARON INTO EASTCHEAPING

So on the morrow just before midnight came Osberne and Stephen and the four others to the postern above-said. Osberne and the four were clad, over their armour, in frocks and hoods of up-country fashion ; but Stephen was in his minstrel's raiment, save that he bore no fiddle, and had a heavy short-sword girt to him under his cotehardy. The night was moonless, but there was little cloud, so that there was a glimmer of starlight. As they opened the door came forth from the ingle a tall man, unarmed as it seemed, and clad as a gangrel carle, and Stephen without more ado stretched out his long arm and caught him by the breast of his coat. The man stirred not nor strove, but said softly : " Dost thou not know me, Stephen the Eater ? I come to see the child of Wethermel ; he shall know me by the token of the Imposition of Hands. And I am come to help him and all you." That heard Osberne and spake softly to the others : " This is a friend and a stout-heart ; he shall be of all avail to us."

" Speak not," said Stephen, " but hold we on, and go crouching till we be under the lee of the dyke." Even so did they, and Stephen led the way, but Osberne came next and Steelhead with him ; they spake not together, but Osberne felt the stronger for having him beside him, and his heart was full of joy.

So they clomb the dyke, and as they topped it they saw a weaponed man on his feet betwixt them and the sky. Stephen stood up straightway and fell a-whistling

a merry tune, but softly enough, while he made a sign to the others to fetch a compass and go creeping past this man. So did they, while Stephen and the warder walked toward one another ; but so soon as they met, the warder knew his friend, and hailed him and said : “ Well, minstrel, thou art back again pretty soon ; what is toward, man ? ” Said Stephen : “ Sooth to say, I went not all the way home ; for it came into my mind that maybe the Baron might call for me again ; and when it rains florins I am fain to have my hat under the spout.” Said the warder : “ Thou art come in time, for the Baron is somewhat ailing, and whiles he sleeps not well a-nights ; it was but last night when it was so, and he sends for me and asks me of thee, and biddeth me fetch thee ; and St. Peter ! the uproar when I told him that thou wert gone ; and it was hardly that I escaped a whippcord supper. Howsoever, his wrath ran off him in a little, and then he bade me look out for thee, and if I find thee I am to bring thee to him at any hour of day or night wherein the armour is off him : wherefore, see thou, in happy hour art thou come. So abide me till I go and fetch a fellow to keep my watch, and then will I go on with thee to my lord.”

“ Wait a while,” said Stephen ; “ to say sooth I have hereby an old carle, my uncle, and his son, a young swain, and both they are good at song, and the older man a very poke stuffed full of old tales : how were it if I brought them along ? ”

“ It were good,” said the warder, “ for it shall, see thou, make a change of disport for our lord, and that will please him the more. So go now, bring up hither thy kinsmen, and I will see to my watch and we will meet here straightway.”

So then Stephen went to his folk, who were creeping nigher and nigher to the Great Bastide, and were as now in broken ground somewhat bushed, a good lurking-place to wit. There he finds them, and bids the four abide their coming back with their prey, which now he nowise doubted of, and takes Steelhead and Osberne along with him, and brings them to the warder ; who laughed when he saw Steelhead, for he went for that time all bent and bowed, and, as he deemed by what he could see under the dim sky, ragged and wretched. Said he : " Minstrel, thou wert scarce in luck to happen on this rag of a kinsman of thine. Hast thou no better, man ? " Said Stephen, grinning in the dark : " Abide till ye have proved him. Trust me, he hath something better than sour curds in his belly." " Well," said the warder, " let-a-be ! As for the young man, he seems like enough. Now then, fellow, for a pull at the florin-tree."

So they went, the four of them, toward the Great Bastide, and none hindered them, deeming that they were of the service of the Baron. Even at the door of the Baron's lodging the warder (there was but one and a chamberlain) nodded friendly to the soldier and let them pass unquestioned. They entered the chamber, wherein now was no man, as the Baron would have it whenas he listed to sleep. The soldier went forward on tip-toe, but Stephen trod heavily, and Steelhead laughed aloud, and went straight up to the great man's bed-head, and fared to pass his hand over his face from his forehead to his chin, just touching him, but the sleeping man waked not. As for Osberne, he stood betwixt the door and the soldier, and drew his sword forth from under his carter's frock, but it was not Boardcleaver, for he had left him at

home. The soldier looked from one to another, and stared astonished at their demeanour. Straightway then he had both Stephen and Osberne on him at once : nor had he any senses nor might to strive with them, who stripped his coat off over his head, gagged him, and tied him hand and foot. By then they had done this, Steelhead had taken up the naked Baron and set some of the warder's raiment on him, and done on him the said warder's coat and sallet over all ; and there stood the man of worship, waked up now, as it seemed, but looked before him as if he saw naught, even as a man who walks in sleep. Stephen the meantime unstrung his fiddle and began to play a slow sweet tune thereon, and let his big but melodious voice go with it, and thus they brought the lordship of Deepdale to the door, and still he seemed of no avail, save to walk on as Steelhead would have him.

So out they fared, and none hindered them any more than when they went in ; and they came to the bushed ground where lay the four townsmen and stirred them, and so went on all seven with their new fellow the Baron, who still walked on like a man in his sleep.

They made a compass about the warder who had taken the place of Stephen's friend, so that he might not challenge them, and came fair and softly to the dyke, and thereafter to the postern. There Stephen knocked after the manner appointed, and the door opened and showed the passage all full of armed men. But Stephen cried out : " All's well, friend Dickon, and there shall be no sally out tonight, only take us in, and bring me and Captain Osberne to Sir Medard, for we have somewhat to show him."

So they gat them into the town, they and their new guest ; but ere the door was shut, Steelhead took

Osberne by the skirt and drew him a little aside and said : " Lad of Wethermel, in all ways hast thou shown thy valiancy, and I am glad of thee. Now I have come from the hill-sides and the crannies of the rocks to look upon thee, and I must get me back at once ; for within a builded town I may not be. But I can see that it will not be long till we meet in the mountains. So I tell thee, when thou deemest thy need and thy grief to be as great as it may be, hie thou to the little dale where first we met, and call on me by the token of the bow I gave thee then, and presently thou shalt have tidings : now farewell."

" Yea, but hold," said Osberne, " wilt thou not enter, even if it be to go forth at once by another gate with much company ? else wilt thou be tangled amongst all these foemen."

" Trouble not thyself about me," said Steelhead ; " it shall not be hard for me to go where I will in despite of any foeman."

CHAPTER XXVII

THEY PARLEY FROM THE WALLS

THEREWITH he was gone and Osberne entered the town after his fellows, and the Baron of Deepdale was brought to Sir Medard in the great tower. There they would have served him with all honour, but he was not yet come out of that trance ; so they laid him to rest in Sir Medard's own bed, and had warders both within the chamber and without ; and Osberne sat talking with Sir Medard in the said chamber till dawn was, when the Baron awoke really and fairly, and called

for drink. And Sir Medard brought it unto him with his own hand, and the Baron stared at him and said : " Art thou of the service tonight ? I know thee not." Quoth Sir Medard : " And yet we have been near enough together ere this, Lord Baron ; thou shouldst know me, meseems." The Baron looked hard on him and then round about the chamber, and cried out : " Holy Mary ! 't is Medard the carle-leader. Where am I, and where is the evil beast of a minstrel ? Hath he beguiled me ?" Said Medard : " Lord, at this present thou art in a chamber of my poor house in Eastcheaping. Doubtless tomorrow, after we have had some talk together, thou and I and the Porte, thou mayst go back home to Deepdale, or abide here a while to see how we can feast, we carle-warriors, and to be holden in all honour."

Now came forth Stephen the Eater and said : " Lord, lo here the evil beast of a minstrel who hath verily beguiled thee ; but, Baron, it is to thy gain and not thy loss. For tomorrow shall the war be ended, and thou shalt be free to go back again to the fair women of Deepdale whom thou lovest so much, and shalt save thy men-at-arms, and thy weapons and tents and timber, and victuals and drink a great heap ; and all this I deem, and more maybe, wouldst thou have lost hadst thou gone on sitting perversely before Eastcheaping all for nought. So I will not say pardon me, but make friends with me rather for being good to thee." And therewith he reached out his great hand to the Baron ; but Osberne drew him back by the girdle, and chid him for mocking a captive, while the Baron turned his face to the wall and covered up his head with the bed-clothes.

But ye may judge if there were riding and running

in the leaguer next morning when they could find the Baron nowhere ; and one said this and the other that ; and he cried Kill and slay, and he cried Flee ere we all come to like end ; and great was the doubt and the turmoil. Amidst of which comes Sir Medard on to the battlement of the north-west tower, and beside him a squire bearing a white banner, and a herald with a trumpet, which herald presently blew a loud blast, but such an one as sounded not of war but of parley. So when the captains and leaders heard the said blast and saw the white banner of peace, they deemed that new tidings were toward, and a half score of them crossed over their dyke bearing a white banner with them, and came close under the tower whereon stood Sir Medard ; and the chiefest of them, an old hoar man and very wise, hight Sir Degore, stood before the others all unhelmed and said : “ Is it Sir Medard that standeth up there ? ”

“ Yea verily,” said the Knight ; “ and what art thou ? art thou a leader of the host that sitteth about us ? ” Said the other : “ I am Sir Degore, of whom thou wilt have heard ; under my lord the Baron of Deepdale I am the leader of this host, and I have come to ask what thou wouldst of us.” Said Sir Medard : “ I would see the Baron of Deepdale.”

“ He is sick this morning,” said Sir Degore, “ and may not rise ; but if thou wouldst render the town and the castle unto him, it is all one, thou mayst make me serve thy turn ; I know his mind full well.”

Sir Medard laughed : “ Nay,” said he, “ we will wait for that till we may see the Baron himself. But tell me, Sir Knight, what is all this stir and hubbub in thine host this morning ? ”

Said Sir Degore, without tarrying the word one

moment : " There is a great aid and refreshment come to us out of the East country, both of victual and men, and our folk be welcoming the men and sharing the victual."

" There is nothing in this, then, that we have heard, that ye cannot find your Duke, and are seeking him up and down ? "

" Nay, nothing," said the grey-beard, wagging his head. But the folk that were with him looked on each other and thought within themselves how wise the old man was. And Sir Medard spake when he might for his laughter : " Sir, thy lord did well to make thee captain under him, for thou art a wise and ready liar. But so it is that thou speakest with one who knoweth the tale better than thou. Ho ye, bring forward my lord."

Straightway came two squires, who led a lean dark man between them, unarmed and clad in a long furred black gown. He took off his hat, and thereupon Sir Degore and all they below knew him for their lord. He spake at once and said : " Sir Degore and ye others, my lords and captains, can ye hear me ? "

" Yea, lord," said Sir Degore.

Then said the Baron : " This then is my word and commandment, that ye give leave to all our folk-in-arms to depart each one to his own house, and to bear away with him his weapons and armour and three horses if he be of the knighthood, and one if he be of the sergeantry ; but the others, archers and villeins, may take one horse between three to bear their baggage and ease them on the journey. But the flour and wheat and wine, and all the neat and sheep, ye shall leave behind ; for the folk of this country-side and the good town have occasion for them. But as to mine

own matters which are of mine own person, as arms and raiment and jewels and the like, ye shall bring them unto me here in the good town, where I am minded to abide two or three days that I may hold counsel about weighty matters with the Porte and the Burgreve. Moreover, I would have thee, Sir Degore, and a five of my counsellors and a half score of my servants, come hither to me to abide with me for my aid and service while I tarry in Eastcheaping. Now this is my will and pleasure, and I shall be no wiser later on ; wherefore do thou, Sir Degore, go straight-way and tell my will to the captains and sergeants and the knights, so that the hosts may presently break up."

Ye may deem how Sir Degore and the other Deepdalers were abashed when they knew that their lord was a captive in the hands of the foemen ; yet they seemed to think that the terms of the good town were not so hard as might have been looked for, since they had gotten this so great advantage.

Now Sir Degore spake and said : " Sir Medard, wilt thou suffer me to come up to thee, so that I may speak with my lord privily ? " " To what end," said Sir Medard, " since thou hast heard thy lord's commandment ? wilt thou not obey him ? " " Yea," said Degore, " if I have heard his last word ; nevertheless I were fain to come and speak with him." " Come up then," said Sir Medard ; " yet I must warn thee that it may be easier for thee to come in to Eastcheaping today than to go out therefrom. Moreover, bethink ye if ye dally how it would be were we to open our gates and fall upon you with all ours, and ye disarrayed and leaderless."

Therewith he gave word to open the postern to Sir Degore, who entered and was brought to the top of

the tower, and there he went up to the Baron and bent the knee to him and might not refrain his tears ; but the Baron laughed, yet somewhat hardly. So they two went aside into an ingle of the tower toward the town, while Sir Medard and his stood aloof a while. Then turned back Sir Degore to them of Eastcheaping, and said : “ Sir Medard, I pray thee leave to depart to my host, that I may do after the bidding of my lord.”

“ Yea, go,” said Sir Medard ; “ yet I would have thee remember that I pray for a long life for the Baron of Deepdale, since he hath become so good a friend to our town, and that thou wilt be in the wrong if thou do aught to shorten it.”

So Degore went his ways, and he and those counsellors and leaders went back sadly to the leaguer, and fell to work to undo all they had done the six months past. And it was no long time ere the stout men-at-arms of Deepdale began to flow away from before Eastcheaping, and the men of the town held good watch all the while ; and ere it was evening divers bands of them went out of-gates in good order to see that none of the Deepdalers abode in array in the leaguer, and found nothing there which they had cause to dread. And they took much spoil of that which the Baron’s host must needs leave behind. Meanwhile Sir Medard and his made what cheer they might to the Baron ; and Sir Medard showed Osberne unto him, and told him all the tale of the wolves and the slaying of Hardcastle, and did him to wit that much of the valiancy which they of Eastcheaping had shown in the war came of this lad of Wethermel. And the Baron marvelled, and looked upon Osberne and said : “ Well, lad, if ever thou art hard bestead, come thou

to Deepdale, and we shall find somewhat for thee to do ; and I bid thee thrive hale and well ! ”

Howbeit Sir Medard told not to the Baron that Osberne had been one of them that bore him off the last night. Yet somehow he came to know it in time to come ; I wot not through whom or how.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BARON OF DEEPDALE MAKES PEACE

So now the war was over, for the next day the Baron of Deepdale signed the deed of peace which gave up to the Porte of Eastcheaping all that for which they had withstood him ; and withal some deal of ransom he had to pay for his own body, how much my tale-teller knoweth not, but deemeth that they would scarce put the snepe upon him as to bid but a squire's or knight-bachelor's ransom for a free baron, a lord of wide lands, who had under him towns, tolls, and markets.

So the ransom being paid, or some deal of it, and pledges left for the remnant, the Baron went his ways in no very evil mood, and it was soon seen that they of Eastcheaping would no longer need the men they had waged over and above those who were due to them for service, wherefore leave was given to such waged men to depart, and the Dalesmen amongst others. But gifts were given them largely, over and above their war-pay, and to Osberne and Stephen the Eater in especial. Unto whom, amongst other things, the Butchers' gild of the good town did on the eve of his departure bring a great and fair ox, white of colour ;

and they had gilded the horns of the beast, and done him about with garlands : but on a scroll between the horns was fairly writ the words, The Eater's Ox. Which gift Stephen received as it was given, very lovingly, and many a cup they drank together over him ; but Stephen said ere his friends departed : " Yet look ye, lads of Eastcheaping, though this ox be mine, yet shall he not be the ox of the Eater ; for slay him will I never, but let live on and on for love of our friends of Eastcheaping so long as I may buy, beg, or steal a cow's grass for him."

As for Osberne, though he bought in the booths a pretty many of such things as were goodly and little, of goldsmiths' work and the like, to flit to his friend across the Sundering Flood, yet no gift would he take, save a very fair armour of the spoils of Deepdale : and this was no gift, said Sir Medard, but what he had earned himself by hard toil enough.

All loved him, but Sir Medard in especial, who had fain dubbed him knight ; but Osberne would not, and said that such had been no wont of his fathers before him ; and he looked never to go very far from the Dale and for no long while. " And even if I may not live there," quoth he, " I look to die there ;" and he reddened therewith till the eyes looked light in the face of him. But Medard said : " Wheresoever thou livest or diest thou wilt live and die a great-heart. But this I bid thee, whenso thou hast need of a friend who may show thee the road into the world of needs, when thou hast aught to hide or aught to seek, come thou unto me, and be sure that I shall not fail thee."

Osberne thanked him from his whole heart, and they kissed and departed with all love ; and as the Dalesmen rode down the street toward the western gate,

it was full of folk shouting out praises and blessings ; and the windows were full of women who cast down flowers on them as they went along, saying that but for these stout-hearts they might have had neither town nor honour nor children, and that nought was good enough for such friends as these. Thus rode the Dalesmen out of Eastcheaping.

But of the ten score and six that had ridden out of the Dale, two score and two were lacking, who had either been slain in battle or so sorely hurt that they were no longer fightworthy ; but sixteen had dropped in by ones and twos and threes to fill the places of these, so that they rode back but little fewer than they came.

CHAPTER XXIX

OSBERNE AND HIS MEN RETURN TO WETHERMEL

Now on a fair evening a little ere sunset of the beginning of October, came those Dalesmen amongst the black rocks and rough places that crowned the bent which looked down west over the Dale. And now, though they had been talking merrily and loud for the last three hours, their hearts were so full within them that scarce a word might they say one to another. And when at last they had won through that rocky tangle and had opened Wethermel, and nought lay before them but the grassy slopes and the wide-spread valley cleft by the line of the Sundering Flood ; now, when they saw in the clear air the grey houses of Wethermel lying together, and the smoke of the evening cooking-fires going up to the heavens, and the sheep wending on, thick and huddling before the driving of

three tall men, and the kine moving towards the byre and the women amongst them, then this befel: that whereas they had been all of one mind that when they came to the crown of the bent, they would spur on and race merrily toward Wethermel, yet now when it lay before them, and there was so little a way betwixt them and its hearth, they all of them with one consent drew rein and sat still on their horses, as if they had suddenly come face to face with the host of the foemen. Yea, some there were, and they rather of the oldest than the youngest, who might not refrain them, but fell a-weeping and sobbing, whether it were for joy or sorrow, or a blending of both, may scarce be said.

Osberne wept not: sooth to say, the turmoil of hope and fear within his heart ate up somewhat the softness that might else have mastered him at this new sight of his fathers' house. He rode forth before the others, and lifted up his voice and loudly and clearly cried a blessing on the Dale and the dwellers therein, and then rode on soberly down the bent, and the others followed him still silently. But when they were drawn anigh, and every soul, man, woman and child, ran forth from the garth to meet and welcome them, then at last their joy brake forth, and they gat off their horses and gave themselves up to the caresses of the women and the embracing of the carles, and loud was the speech and the laughter amongst them.

Osberne was met first by Nicholas his grandsire, who kissed and embraced him, and then gave him up to his grandam and the fostermother, and one or other of these twain would scarce let go of him a long while.

But now was riding and running after victual for so

big a company of men ; for nought would serve the folk of Wethermel but that the whole fellowship must abide there that night. But all was got ready in a while, and meanwhile the stay-at-homes might not have enough of praising and caressing the folk returned, and everything they said or did was a wonder.

At last the feast was arrayed, and the hall was thronged as much as might be, and folk fell to meat, and now they were all exceeding merry ; and when they had done eating, the boards were drawn to make more room, and they fell to the drink, and after the first cup to Christ, and the second to Allhallows, the third was drunk to the home-comers from the war. Yet were not the stay-at-homes to be put off with so little, and they called a cup for Osberne the Captain of the warriors ; and when it had been drunk, then all folk looked toward the captain to see what he would do ; but he rose up and stood in his place, his cheek flushed and his eyes sparkling : and the word came into his mouth, and he sang :

The War-god's gale
 Drave down the Dale
 And thrust us out
 To the battle shout ;
 We wended far
 To the wall of war
 And trod the way
 Where the edges lay,

The rain of the string rattled rough on the field
 Where the haysel was hoarded with sword-edge and
 shield.

Long lived the sun
 When the play was begun,

And little but white
Was the moon all night ;
But the days drew in
And work was to win,
And on the snow
Lay men alow,

And at Yule fared we feasting in war-warded wall
And the helm and the byrny were bright in the hall.

Then changed the year
And spring was dear,
But no maid went
On mead or bent,
For there grew on ground
New battle-round,
New war-wall ran
Round houses of man,

There tower to tower oft dark and dim grew
At noontidé of summer with rain of the yew.

Neath point and edge
In the battle hedge
We dwelt till wore
Late summer o'er ;
In the autumn night
We steered aright
The wisdom bark
Through the steel-thronged dark,

The warrior we wafted from out of the fray,
And he woke midst the worthy and hearkened their say.

Now peace is won
And all strife done,
And in our hands
The fame of lands

Aback we bear
 To the dale the dear,
 And the Fathers lie
 Made glad thereby.

Now blossometh bliss in the howes of the old
 At our tale growing green from their tale that is told.

Loud was the glee and the shouting at his song, and all men said that every whit thereof was sooth, and that this was the best day that had ever dawned on Wethermel ; and great joy and bliss was on the hall till they must needs go to their rest. So changed was Wethermel, the niggard once, and that, it might be deemed, was but one youngling's doing.

CHAPTER XXX

OSBERNE GOES TO THE TRYSTING-PLACE

BUT on the morrow ere the day was old, the guests departed in all contentment each to his own folk, and Osberne and the Wethermel men led them out with blessings.

When they were all gone and the unwonted stir was over, it seemed to Osberne as if he were awaking from a dream, and his heart was in a turmoil of hope and fear, so that he knew not what to do till he was once more at the Bight of the Cloven Knoll. He tarried for nought save to take up the gifts of Eastcheaping, and he had no weapon with him save his bow and arrows wherewith to flit the said gifts across the water, but he was gaily clad in a coat of green, flowered with gold, which he had bought him at Eastcheaping ; and a fair and lovely youth he looked, as he strode along

at his swiftest toward the trysting-place, his face flushed, his brows a little knit with mingled trouble and joy, his lips parted with his eager breathing. Whiles as he went he said to himself, How many chances and changes there were, and how might he expect to find Elfhild there again? and next, when he had enough afflicted himself with thinking of her sick, or dead, or wedded, his strong heart of a youth threw it off again, and he thought, How could evil such as that befall him, the stalwarth and joyous?

So he fared till he came within sight of the ness, and saw no figure there on the top of it: yet he straightway fell to running, as though he knew she had been waiting for him a long while; but as he ran he kept his eyes down on the ground, so that he might not see her place empty of her. But when he came to his place he lifted up his eyes, and there to his great joy saw her coming up the slope of the ness; and when she saw him she uttered a great cry and spread out her arms and reached out to him. But as for him, he might make neither word nor sound a great while, but stood looking on her. Then he said: "Is it well with thee?"

"O yea, yea," she said, "and over-well as now."

"Art thou wedded?" said he.

"Yea," she said, "unto thee."

"O would that we were, would that we were!" said Osberne.

"O!" she said, "be not sad this morning, or wish for aught so that it grieve thee. Bethink thee how dear this moment is, now at last when our eyes behold each other."

"Hast thou come here often to look for me?" said he. She said: "It was the fourteenth of May was a year that we parted; now is this the eighth day of

October. That makes five hundred and eleven days : not oftener than that have I come here to look for thee."

So piteous-kind she looked as she spake, that his bosom heaved and his face changed, and he wept. She said : " I wish I had not said that to make thee weep for me, my dear." He spake as his face cleared : " Nay, my dear, it was not all for thee, but for me also ; and it was not all for grief, but for love." She said : " With this word thou givest me leave to weep ;" and she wept in good sooth.

Then in a while she said : " And now thou wilt sit down, wilt thou not ? and tell me all thy tale, and of thy great deeds, some wind whereof hath been blown to us across the Sundering Flood. And sweet it will be to hear thy voice going on and on, and telling me dear things of thyself."

" Even so will I do," said Osberne, " if thou wilt ; yet I were fain to hear of thee and how thou hast fared this while ; and thy words would I hear above all things." The voice of him quavered as he spake, and he seemed to find it hard to bring any words out : but his eyes were devouring her as if he could never have enough of looking on her. Forsooth there was cause, so fair she was, and he now come far into his eighteenth year. She was that day clad all in black, without any adornment, and her hair was knit up as a crown about her beauteous head, which sat upon her shoulders as the swan upon the billow : her hair had darkened since the days of her childhood, and was now brown mingled with gold, as though the sun were within it ; somewhat low it came down upon her forehead, which was broad and white ; her eyes were blue-grey and lustrous, her cheeks a little hollow, but the jaw truly wrought, and fine and clear, and her chin firm and lovely carven ;

her lips not very full, but red and lovely, her nose straight and fine. The colour of her clear and sweet, but not blent with much red : rather it was as if the gold of her hair had passed over her face and left some little deal behind there. In all her face was a look half piteous, as though she craved the love of folk ; but yet both mirth and swift thought brake through it at whiles, and sober wisdom shaded it into something like sternness. Low-bosomed she was yet, and thin-flanked, and had learned no tricks and graces of movement such as women of towns and great houses use for the beguiling of men. But the dear simpleness of her body in these days when the joy of childhood had left her, and a high heart of good longing was ever before her, was an allurements of love and far beyond any fooling such as that.

Now she said : “ How thou lookest on me, dear Osberne, and thy face is somewhat sober ; is there aught that thou likest not in me ? I will do as thou biddest, and tell all the little there is to tell about me, ere thou tellest me all the mickle thou hast to tell about thee.”

He said, and still spake as if the words were somewhat hard to find : “ I look upon thee, Elfhild, because I love thee, and because thou hast outgrown thy dear-ness of a year and a half ago and become a woman, and I see thee so fair and lovely, that I fear for thee and me, that I desire more than is my due, and that never shall we mend our sundering ; and that even what I have may be taken from me.” She smiled, yet somewhat faintly, and spake : “ I call that ill said ; yet shalt thou not make me weep thereby, such joy as I have of the love in thy words. But come, sit thou down, and I shall tell thee my tidings.”

So they sat down each as nigh unto the edge as they might ; and Osberne spake no more for that while, but looked and listened, and Elfhild said : “ Day by day I have come hither, sometimes sadder and sorrier than at others, whiles with more hope, and whiles with less, whiles also with none at all. Of that thou wottest already or mayst bethink thee. Of tidings to call tidings the first is that my kinswoman, my mother’s sister, has changed her life : she died six months ago, and we brought her to earth by the church of All-hallows the West, hard by the place of the Cloven Mote. Needs must I say that, though she was the last one of my kindred, the loss of her was no very grievous sorrow to me, for ever she had heeded me little and loved me less, though she used me not cruelly when I was little ; and her burial was a stately one as for a poor house in the West Dale. Now furthermore, as for the carline who is the only one left to look after me, by my deeming she doth love me, and moreover she hath belike more of might than were to be looked for of so old and frail-seeming a woman, and that besides her mickle wisdom. Whereof hearken this, which is the second tidings of note I have to tell thee. It is now some two months ago, when summer was waning into autumn, that on an evening just after sunset we were sitting after our wont in our house, which, though it be neither grand nor great, is bigger than we need for us twain. Comes a knock on the door, and the carline goes thereto, and is followed back into the chamber by a tall man, clad neither as one of our country-side nor as a warrior, but in a long black gown with furred edges. He had no weapons save a short sword and a whittle in his girdle ; he was not ill-looking, black-bearded and ruddy-faced, and

seemed strong-built, a man of about five and forty winters. He hailed us courteously, and asked if he might abide with us till morning, and we naysaid him not, if he might do with such cheer as we might make him. He smiled, and said any cheer was better worth to him than the desert as at that time : and he said withal that he had a way-beast without who was as weary as was he ; and, says he, there is a pair of saddle-bags on him, which many would not deem over-much of a burden, if they had not very far to carry it.

“ So I went out a-doors with him to see after his nag and saddle-bags ; and I led the horse into the same stall where was winter quarters for our two horses ; but this was a very big stark beast, grey of colour, such as we have not in this land ; and I gave him hay and barley, but the saddle-bags he brought back with him into the chamber. And he kept ever by my side on the way there and back, and looked at me oft in the failing light, though I was but in my sorry old raiment with bare feet, in such guise as thou hast not seen me for years, my dear. Howsoever, I heeded it not at the time, and we both came back into the chamber, where Dame Anna had now lighted the candles. Shortly to say, we put what meat and drink we might before our guest, and he seemed well content therewith ; and he was merry with us, and showed himself a man of many words deftly strung together, and spared not to tell us many things about tidings of far and noble countries, and the ways of men both great and small therein. And he said that he was a chapman journeying after gain, and looked to buy wares in the Dale, and therewith he asked us if we had aught to sell him, but Anna laughed and said : ‘ Fair sir, were ye to buy all this and all that is in it, from groundsill to roofridge, and

all our kine and sheep and horses to boot, little would the tide of gold ebb in thy bags yonder.' 'I wot not,' he said; 'who may say what treasure ye have been hoarding here this long while?' He looked on me as he spake, and I reddened and looked down, for in my heart I was thinking of the pipe and the gemmed necklace which the Dwarfs had given me. And yet more than all, of thy gifts, Osberne, which have been so dear to me: for soothly to say, of these matters I had never told Dame Anna, though she knoweth that I go oft to look upon thee here and that I love thee. However, that talk ran off, and presently the chapman got to asking Anna about the matters of the Dales, and the ways of its folk, and amongst other things as to how wealthy they were, and she answered him simply as she could. He asked her also if they loved their bairns and children well, and also if they had any custom thereabout of casting any of their women-children forth, if it happened to be their fortune to have many daughters and little meat, and that especially when the years were bad. But thereat she cried out Haro! and said that such a deed was unheard of, and that when times were bad and there was lack, then hand helped foot and foot hand.

"Well," says he, smiling, "that failed Hamdir's Sons once, and may do others again." Then he asked withal if it were not true that things had run short in the Dale this last season; and she answered, as was true of this west side of the Dale, where was no man called to war, that so it was. And again that talk dropped. But the carline, methought, looked keenly at him. After a while Anna asked the guest if he had will to go to bed, and he answered, No, he would wake

the meat well into his belly. Then she bade me fare to bed, which I did, nought loth, for when all was said I scarce liked the looks of the man. As for my bed, it was a shut-bed, and opened not out of the chamber wherein we were, but out of an inner one, rather long than wide. There I lay down and went to sleep before long, but deemed I heard no little talk going on betwixt Anna and the guest ere I forgot all. And moreover Anna came to me and waved her hands over me before I went off sound.

“But when I woke again it seemed to me that I had slept long, but I slipped out of bed and laid hold of my smock to do it on, and even therewith I shrank aback, for there before me, naked in his shirt and holding the door of my shut-bed with one hand and his whittle in the other, was the stranger. But therewithal came Dame Anna and said: ‘Heed him not, for as yet he is asleep though his eyes be open. Do on thy raiment speedily, my Elhild, and come forth with me, and let him wake up by himself.’ Even so I did, not rightly understanding her words. But when we were gotten into the garth and the mead Anna told me all, to wit, how that this wretch, after I had gone to sleep, had bidden her a price for me to bear me off safely and wholly with him. And that may easily be done, says he, as I see of thee that thou art wise in wizardry and canst throw the maiden into a sleep which she will not awake from till due time is; for, says he, I want two things, to have her in mine arms to do as I will with, and thereafter to bear her home with me, will she nill she. ‘Now,’ said Anna, ‘I would not wholly gainsay him at once, for I would have my fox safe in the trap; so I hemmed and hawed, and said that he might belike rue his bargain unless he were

full sure what it were worth ; and to be short, I so egged him on and drew him back, and drew him back and egged him on, that at last he took off his outer raiment, gat his bare whittle in one hand and laid the other on the door. Now, my dear, I have long known thy door that I may so do that it will do my will in many matters ; so when I saw the chapman's hand on the edge thereof, I spake a few words to it and went to bed myself, whereas I wotted that runagate could not move hand from door-board, or foot from floor-board, till the time which I had appointed to him ; and thee also I had sent to sleep till the very time when thou didst awaken e'en now.' 'But what shall we do now ?' said I. Said Anna : 'We will abide here in the shaw : there is meat on the board for the guest, and his raiment will not be hard to find, and he knows where are his horse and his gear and his saddle-bags. I doubt me he will not be eager to say farewell either to thee or to me ; for he is not man enough to take his sword in his fist against even an old carline and a young maiden.' So into the shaw we gat us ; as I have told thee, it is at the back of our houses but a furlong off. And there we lay till a little past noon, when we heard a horse going not far off. So we crept to the very edge of the wood and looked forth privily, and presently we saw our chapman riding off west with his saddle-bags and all, and his face was worn and doleful ; at that Anna grinned spitefully, nor for my part might I altogether refrain my laughter. But thou dost not laugh, Osberne ?' He sprang up and cried out fiercely : "I would I had been there to cleave his skull ! Many a better man have I slain for less cause."

Then they were silent a while, and she sat looking

on him fondly, till she spake at last : “ Sweetheart, art thou angry with me for telling thee this tale ? ”

“ Nay, nay,” he said ; “ how might I live save thou told me everything that befel thee ? Yet I must tell thee that I well-nigh wish I had not heard this one ; for there thou dwellest, with none other to ward thee than a carline stricken in years ; and though I wot well from all thou hast said of her, and this last tale in special, that she has mickle might in her, yet she cannot be always with thee, nor belike ever thinking of thee. God forbid, sweetheart, that I should speak to thee in the tongue of the courts and the great houses and lords’ palaces, whenas for a fashion of talking they say of their lemans, and they not always nor often exceeding fair, that they be jewels beyond all price, whom an host of men were not enough to ward. But this I will say,” and he blushed very red at the word, “ that thou art so lovely and so dear that thy man, thy love, and the stout and good friends who love him, were not over many for thy guarding even in this lonely place. And with all that I can be of no more use thereto than if I were a wooden man.”

She stood up also, and he saw that the tears ran over her cheeks, and he stretched out his arms to her ; but she said : “ Grieve not too much, my friend ; and know, as thou saidst e’en now of thyself, that these tears are not wholly for sorrow of thy grief, but O ! so much and so much for joy of thy kindness. And one thing I must tell thee, that if I am alone in my house I am at least alone with a friend, and one who loves me. And this shall come of it, that now every day I shall come down to the tryst, for the carline will hinder me in no way. But I know that oft thou wilt come to meet me : yet belike often thou wilt not,

because I wot how thou hast work to do and things wherein folk call for thee to serve them. So any day if thou come not it shall be well, and if thou come it shall be better."

Now at last he seemed to be learning the full sweetness of her. But she held up her hand and said: "Now I bid thee tarry no longer, but fall to and tell me the tale of thy deeds; for soon shall the short autumn day be waning, and the moment of parting shall steal upon us ere we be ware." Even so he did now; but at first, to say sooth, he made but a poor minstrel, so much his mind was turned unto what she had been telling him; but after a while his scaldship quickened him, and he told her much in manner like life, so that she might as it were see the tidings going on before her. And he held her enwrapped in his tale till the dark and the dusk began to rise up over the earth, and then for that time they parted, and there was to be more of the war of Eastcheaping on the day after tomorrow.

So went Osberne home to Wethermel, and at first it seemed to him as if this first meeting after so long a while had scarce been so good as he had looked for; for both his longing to be close to his love, and the fear which had arisen in his heart as to the stealing of her, were somewhat of a weight on him. But after a little, when he had first been amongst folk and then alone, all that doubt and trouble melted away in the remembrance of her, as she had been really standing before his eyes, and there was now little pain and much sweetness in the longing wherewith he longed for her.

So on the said day appointed he went to meet her, smiling and happy and fresh as a rose; and she was

of like mien, and when they faced each other she smote her palms together as in the old childish time, and cried out: "Ah! now the warrior is all ready and the minstrel is stuffed full of his tale, and happy shall be the hour." And even so it was.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY MEET THROUGH AUTUMN AND WINTER

So many a time they met that autumn, and Elfhild would ever be asking him some boon; as the next time after this, it was the gifts which he had brought for her from the Cheaping; for in thinking of her he had clean forgotten them. So then was the merry time in talking of them, and shooting and hurling of them over, and the donning of them, and the talking of them again. Another time she prayed him to come clad in that goodly armour of the spoils of Deepdale, and he could no less than yeasay her, and there he was on the trysting-day, striding by the river-bank in the sun, like an heap of glittering ice hurrying before the river when the thaw is warm and the sun shining bright at Candlemas. And over that also went many pretty plays, as taking the pieces off, and naming them, and doing them on again and the like.

So wore the days into winter, and yet the two saw each other full often even through the frost and snow and ill weather. And when the spring came, then it was dear to them indeed. And by that time had Osberne's fears about the stealing of Elfhild much worn off; though it is to be said that exceeding oft his heart was weary and sore with the longing to hold

her in his arms. Yet the most of these times he kept his grief in his own heart ; so much as Elfhild was moved when it brake forth from him, and she might, so to say, see the torments of him before her very eyes. Indeed on one time, when for a long while she might not comfort him, she told him that this was almost as bad as seeing him laid a-dying before her.

But kind and dear they were to each other, and there was nought in them that was not lovely in those first days of their manhood.

CHAPTER XXXII

FOEMEN AMONG THE WESTDALERS

BUT when the spring was worn into April there fell new tidings : for on a morning early came Stephen the Eater hurrying into the hall at Wethermel and cried aloud : “ Bows, bows ! Come afield all ye of this hall, and thou chiefly, Osberne the Captain ! ”

Out then tumbled the stout men of Wethermel from shut-bed and hutch, and were presently armed, and Osberne was in his byrny and steel hood straightway, his bow in his hand and his quiver at his back.

They gathered about him and Stephen amidst of the hall, and then Osberne asks what is toward. “ Great matter enough,” says Stephen. “ Yet how to help therein ? There is unpeace in the Dale, but it has fallen on the Westerlings.”

Quoth Osberne, short and sharp : “ Ye, Otter, Simon, Longdeer, Alison, take horse and ride straightway down the Dale and round to every stead, and bid men gather to the side of the Flood with bows and

sling-spears and shot-weapons of all kinds, and that they stand not in knots and clumps, but drawn out in line, and space enough betwixt each shooter. Bid them to leave not a shaft at home—we may speedily make more—but not to loose once till they have marked their man. Now hasten ye four ! But ye others come after me at once, for we will go afoot for the saving of time and the steadying of the shooting.”

So they went toward the water, a dozen men all told, and all had bows and good store of shafts. And as they went, Osberne spake to those about him and said : “ Spread out, and make little show of force, and show not your bows to the foemen, so that they may contemn us and venture the nearer to the bank. But shoot not till they defy us, lest we smite a peaceful man.” Now they were presently nigh enough to see the going of men on the further shore, and they were all riders. It was clear to see that they were aliens, men upon big horses clad in outlandish armour with bright steel headpieces ; they bore long spears with light shafts, and a many of them had short horseman’s bows and quivers at their backs along with their targes.

Now as the men of Wethermel drew up to the water’s edge, a knot of the said aliens, about a score, came to them shouting and yelling, and there were within sight scattered about the fields some two hundreds in all. When they reined up by the Flood-side one of them, who seemed by the gold on his armour and weapons to be a chief, hove his spear aloft and brandished it, and fell to crying out in what seemed to be words ; but since they knew not his Latin they gat no meaning from them, but he spake in a masterful and threatening voice. Then by Osberne’s bidding, Stephen, who

stood anigh him, drew a white clout from his scrip, made it fast to his spear and held it aloft, to show that they would have parley. But for all answer the chieftain and his brake out a-laughing; and then the chieftain gat his spear by the midmost, and made as if he would cast at them; but the Flood there was over wide for spear-shot. Then one of his folk unslung his short bow and nocked a shaft, and turned to the chief as if asking leave, and the chief nodded him yeasay. Quoth Osberne hastily: "Stephen, cover thee! It will be thou. Then if he looses, we loose, for this is a foeman."

Even therewith the shaft flew, and Stephen turned it with his shield. Then the Wethermelters set up a shout and bent their bows, and Osberne loosed first, and the shaft smote the chieftain in the eye, and he fell dead off his horse: Stephen also put a shaft into the man who had shot at him, and three others of them fell withal at the first loose, besides three that were hurt. And the aliens liked the Wethermel breakfast so ill, that they turned their backs to the river at once and scuttled away into the field out of shot, yet not before they had lost two more men and three horses.

Osberne stayed his men there a little while to see if the foe would bring up others to go on with the game; but the aliens were over wily for that, as it seemed; for they but gathered together, and turning all their heads down-dale fared on in one body.

As yet the Dalesmen had seen nought of any onset of their neighbours of the West, and sore troubled was Osberne when he fell to thinking that, as the robbers were wending, they must needs chop upon Hartshaw Knolls; so the best he could hope was that Elfhild might flee from her house to some other, or even, it

might be, hide her in the wood, which she knew so inwardly.

Meanwhile he bade his men go quietly down-stream on the river's edge. Saith he: "If aught is to be done from this side, we shall presently have the folk from the lower steads drifting in to us, and we should make a good band were it not for yonder wet dyke which the thieves have gotten them for a defence."

So they fared on, and now and again some man of the lifters turned somewhat toward them to look on their demeanour, and whiles one would speed an arrow to them, but did no harm; at last, as they began to draw nigh the narrows above the Bight of the Cloven Knoll, a whole sort of the foemen came riverwards, but somewhat more than half held on the straight way down the Dale. Even therewith came to join the Wethermelers a many of the folk from the downward steads, stout fellows all, and well armed with shot-weapons.

And now there was nought for it but on both sides men were drifting toward the Bight of the Cloven Knoll, nor needeth words to tell of the anguish of Osberne's heart and the fierce wrath of his spirit. When the aliens, who were thronging to the river-bank, saw how narrow the stream was growing, they set up a whoop and drew closer to the Eastdalers, and the more part of them got off their horses and marched along foot by foot with them, and they were now within shot of each other, so that the foemen stayed at whiles and shot them a shaft; and now they hurt divers of the Dalesmen, but Osberne would not suffer them to shoot back as yet.

So came they within sight of the Dwarfs' cave, and there were not a few of the Dalesmen who feared the

place even in the turmoil of battle; and some deemed it might be unlucky to them; but others said that most like Osberne's good luck would prevail over the evil will of the Dwarf-kind.

So when Osberne came to the trysting-place, he and his were fully two score men, and they of the stoutest; and he stood before them all on the very place where his feet had so often stayed for the comforting of his heart and the caressing of his love: there he stood, handling a heavy cast-spear.

Even therewith the aliens poured on to the ness, howling like dogs, and on to Elfhild's very standing-place. Before all his men came a chieftain of them, clad in armour wrought gaudily and decked all with gold and silver, and with a great red horse-tail streaming from his helm. He hove up his hand and poised a great spear, but in that nick of time Osberne cast his weapon suddenly, with a fierce shout, and all about him and behind him he heard the loose of the Dalesmen's bows. Sooth to say, as he cast, he almost looked to see all that turmoil clear away as a dream, and that he should see Elfhild falling with the spear in her breast. But nought it befel: the gold-decked chieftain took the spear under his arm, and he and his spear fell over clashing and clattering down into the gulfs of the green water, and many of the strong-thieves fell before the shaft-storm of the Dalesmen; but therewith the foemen shot also, and some of the Dalesmen were slain and divers hurt, but that abated their hearts no jot. But Osberne took twelve shafts from out his quiver and nocked them one after the other, and every time he loosed a man's life went away on the arrow-point; but bitter was his wrath and his grief that he might not slay them all and deliver his

love. Many a shaft smote him, but the more part of them fell off scatheless from the rings of Hardcastle's loom. Now were many of the thieves slain; yet so fierce and eager were they, that the more part would not draw aback, nay, some were so hungry for that cruel slaughter of them that they heeded not the sundering of the Flood, but rushed on as if there were nought between them, and fell over into the boil of waters and were lost in the bottomless depths.

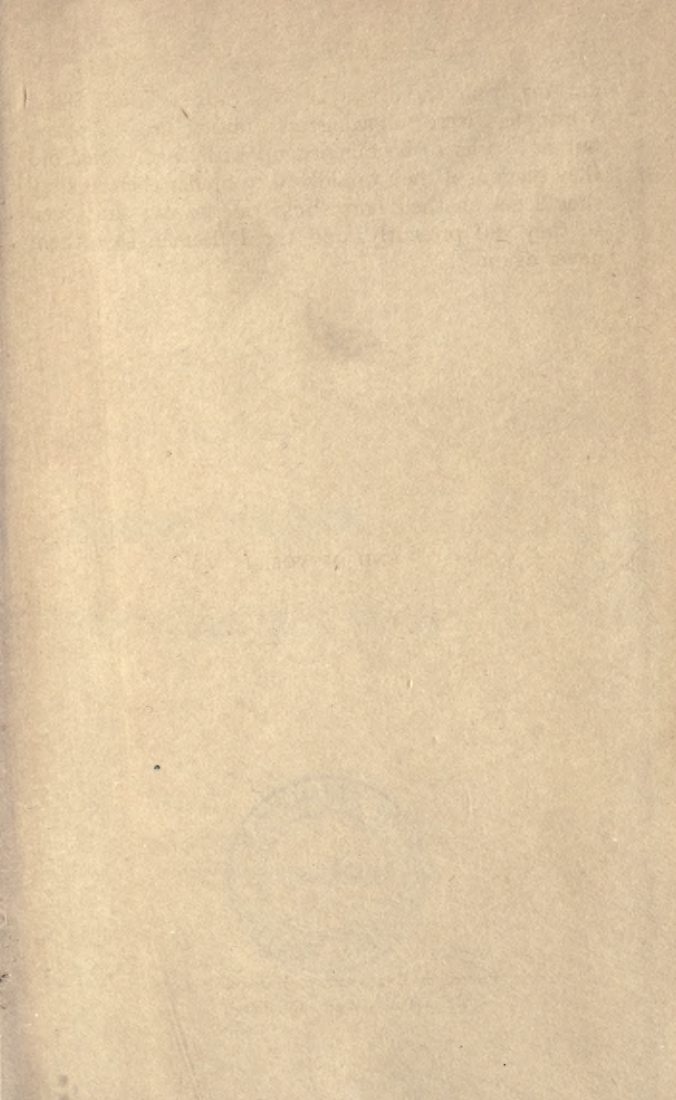
So fared the battle, and the ranks of the Dalesmen began to thin; but Osberne had no thought of going back a foot's length, and his men were so valiant that they deemed nought evil save the sundering of the Flood. Osberne was hurt in three places, but not sorely; but Stephen bore a shaft in his side, yet he stood upon his feet and shot no less valiantly than erst.

But now all of a sudden the raging throng before them had some new goings-on in it and began to sidle landward, and therewithal beyond them rose a great shout, and therein the Eastdalers knew the voice of their kinsmen, and they shouted all together in answer as they plied the bow, and the strong-thieves turned about and ran yelling and cursing toward the landward and the south-west, for the Westdalers were upon them with spear and axe and sword.

That was the end of the shot-stour, and the aliens came never again that tide under the shafts of the Eastdalers. But betwixt the kenning of their dead and the tending of their hurt folk, they stood gazing out anxiously over the field, if they might but see how the battle of handy-strokes had gone, and by seeming right hard had it been; but in a while they saw the aliens thrust back and edging away towards their horses, which they had left standing out of bow-shot

not far from the Bight of the Cloven Knoll. The Westdalers were following on, smiting great strokes, but not so as to be mingled up with them ; nor did they seem as if they would will to hinder them if they should get on their horses and ride away ; and even so they did presently, and the Dalesmen saw them never again.

END OF VOL. I





MORRIS, WILLIAM

The Sundering Flood

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